

THE TRANSFORMING EFFECTS OF THE INCARNATE WORD VIA LECTIO
DIVINA WITHIN INDIVIDUALS IN THE SALVATION ARMY

A THESIS

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENT OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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MAY 2012

This work is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. With him, all things are possible. And to my husband Warren who patiently encouraged and prayed for me through the entire process and to my prayer team partners Dale and Camillia, who spent many hours going before the Lord Jesus Christ on my behalf.

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ABSTRACT

The following work is designed to show the possibilities for spiritual transformation through the Incarnate Word via the Ancient Art of lectio divina. This transformation can take place even though a person's background has been challenging. This work was born out of the writer's desire to meet the cry of the empty human heart.

Of late, there has been a definite resurgence in the areas of spiritual formation and lectio divina. Many books have filled the shelves of the bookstores. Several of the authors will be discussed in the areas of: our need for God, the importance of the Word, the function of and practice of lectio divina and the church's role in spiritual formation.

The theological basis for our Christian foundation in the Trinity, the revelation of Christ as the Word, transformation through the Incarnate Word and the theological basis for lectio divina will be discussed. The writer has also included testimonies of men that have experienced transformation through the Word.

In this work the question of the church's role in spiritual formation will be examined and it will be evidenced that the church of today has come up short and must re-examine where they are in their own process of spiritual growth. The writer explores attitudes and mind sets that churches fall into that can inhibit parishioners in their journey toward transformation. The case studies in this work have been designed to be user-friendly with both individuals and groups. A one day seminar has been provided that will outline the basics needed to guide a group through the history and process of lectio divina and open up a whole new world for those who choose to practice it.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SETTING AND THE PROBLEM

In the Old Testament, in Isaiah 61, there is a prophetic scripture that is proclaimed to be fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament in Luke 4:18-19:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. (Isaiah 61:1-3a)¹

This Messianic prophecy is not only given to comfort the exiles in Babylon, but is also announcing the anointing of the promised Messiah with the Spirit of God.

In Luke 4:1-13 we see Jesus being anointed with the Spirit of God in the Jordan River. He is then led into the desert by the devil and tested. Jesus overcomes each of the devil's temptations with the Word of God. He then returns to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit, and "news about him spread through the whole countryside". He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him" (Luke 4:14-15).

Moving on, Jesus goes to Nazareth where he was raised. He enters the synagogue on the Sabbath and is handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He reads Chapter 61:1-2 and announces, "'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'" (Luke 4:22). He has

¹The Holy Bible, *New International Version Study Bible* (Great Lakes MN: Zondervan, 1985: 1995: 2002) All scripture references in this paper will be from this edition unless stated otherwise.

been anointed to “preach good news to the poor” (v.18) and to bring healing and freedom to those that are, not only physically captive, but spiritually captive. Man is, indeed, walking in darkness. Jesus came to give mankind beauty for ashes, life instead of death, and to all those who receive him he gives them the opportunity to become “children of God” (John 1:12).

The two foundational pieces that are used in this work have been drawn from the multi-faceted resources of Spiritual Formation. The first is the implementation and application of the Incarnate Word of God in the life of the participant. Jesus said in Matthew 4:4 “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’”. The second is the implementation and application of the Word through the ancient art of *lectio divina*, (prayerful reading of the Scriptures). This tool assists in delivering the Incarnate Word to the heart and mind of the reader. It is the premise of this work to show that individuals that are exposed to the Incarnate Word of God via the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* can exhibit spiritual growth and transformation despite their previous life’s circumstances. The evidence put forth in this thesis will also reveal that along with the need for intervention and transformation, we also need the sustaining, life giving flow of the Incarnate Word in our lives, each and every day in order to grow spiritually.

Although transformation and growth are available, there is the age old problem of the disposition of mankind. The Parable of the Sower seen in the Synoptic gospels: Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-13 and in Luke 13:1-24, reveals the ratio of difficulty getting the Word to take root and produce fruit. The ratio is 25%. This phenomenon is due to many outside as well as internal influences. This scripture will be discussed further in

Chapter five along with the presentation of the project studies that were undertaken. The project studies will also reveal similar findings.

Along with the disposition of mankind and the constant war that we wage against the devil, people are heavily influenced by the environmental factors that play a role in their day to day lives. This chapter will endeavor to inform the reader of the spiritual and temporal needs of the people in the community of Attleboro, Massachusetts, as well as those individuals participating in the thesis projects. It will also inform the reader of the type of ministry that The Salvation Army offers to the community.

In this work it will be demonstrated that by adding the recently revived practice of praying the Word through the practice of *lectio divina*, changes have blossomed within the lives of the participants of the studies in spite of being greatly challenged by the world around them. It will also be demonstrated that human choice and intentionality are two very important factors in spiritual formation and growth.

The Community Setting

Bridges of Hope, a ministry of The Salvation Army, was birthed in April of the year 2000 in the City of Attleboro, Massachusetts. Attleboro is a small manufacturing city with a unique combination of urban and suburban living. Attleboro is located in Bristol County and borders Pawtucket, Rhode Island; therefore it is part of the Providence, Rhode Island Metropolitan area. Attleboro covers a land area of 28.3 square miles.²

² The City of Attleboro, Massachusetts. "Community Profile", <http://massachusetts.hometownlocator.com/ma/bristol/attleboro.cfm>. [accessed April 19, 2011].

Attleboro is known as the “Birthplace” of the jewelry industry in New England. As you drive around the community you are reminded of that industry as you see the red brick factory style buildings punctuating the landscape. One of the largest manufacturers and employers that made Attleboro their home was Texas Instruments. Since their decision to leave the city, the roar of industry has quieted down and it has changed the face of employment in the community. Many of the old Texas Instruments buildings have been taken over by social service agencies and a very active community college.

The population of Attleboro was 43,593 as of the 2010 census and is not very diverse. It hosts 82.9% Caucasian, 3% African American, 6.3% Asian and 4.5% Latino. The other 3.3% percentages constitute Native American and Pacific Islanders. 68.2 % of the population is represented by families or non-single residences. There are pockets of poverty, as there are in every city. These areas are near the center of the city where there are many old tenement buildings.

Bridges of Hope is strategically located about two blocks from the center of the city. It is within walking distance from the bus route and the area of low income housing which makes it easy for people in need to access the building. The Corps³ is also located across the street from the District Court House which has brought a myriad of individuals in our front door.

There are five elementary schools in Attleboro, three middle schools, one public high school and one Catholic high school. There currently is gang activity reported in the city with the most prominent gangs being the Crips and the Bloods. Bridges of Hope is

³ In The Salvation Army the Center for Worship and Service is known as the Corps. In a Salvation Army building both social services as well as church activities take place.

currently helping to address this problem with its program for teens at risk, “Bridging the Gap.”⁴

The City of Attleboro has over 25 churches. The main denomination is Roman Catholic with five churches dotted throughout the City. The Baptists have three churches while other denominations such as Episcopal, Methodist, Congregational, and Independent, each have one. Other denominations include Evangelical Covenant, Unitarian, and Seventh Day Adventist.

The closest Salvation Army Corps to Bridges of Hope is in Pawtucket, Rhode Island and it is a Hispanic speaking Corps. Although there are many churches in the area there remains a growing population of un-churched people, especially among the youth. In 1997 a Barna study revealed that there are close to 100 million people in the United States that are un-churched. They also state that the people in the “Northeast (39%) remain the most church resistant.”⁵ This situation only adds to the complexity of the need for a spiritual life or spiritual renewal in the lives of the people in the Attleboro area.

The Planting Process

Attleboro was chosen for the church plant after a demographic study of the community was completed by Divisional Headquarters and the decision was made that there was a real need for a Salvation Army Corps ministry in this city.

⁴ Bridging the Gap is a ministry for teens at risk that is run by The Salvation Army at Bridges of Hope. It is a twelve week life skills program that gives youth an opportunity to learn life skills that are needed to grow and be productive in society. On completion of the program they can clear their record with the court system. This program has had great success in this community.

⁵ Barna Group. “Un-churched –population-nears-100 Million-in-U.S.” <http://www.barna.org/article/12-faithspirituality/107-> Article March 19, 2007. [accessed June 12, 2010].

Like many church plants, the beginning of this ministry was a humble one and certainly experienced many struggles and challenges as well as blessings. In February of 1999 the ministry began in the living room of the author and her husband Warren who are co-pastors and church planters. As we sat in our rocking chairs with a notebook, pen, and Bible in hand, we prayed for hours each day for the vision and will of God. Over the next few months, God would give us a vision of a “place of refuge” for lost and hurting souls, and a place of hope in a hopeless world. The vision would reveal God’s love and care for broken families, single mothers, and those that have been on the fringes of society as well as the fringes of the church. Jeremiah 29:11-13 would be the scripture that Bridges of Hope would be built on: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart’.

Four months into prayer, God began to send people to help launch the ministry. The first couple approached the pastors and offered to come along side after they had heard the vision and mission for the new church. Soon after, others followed, until the pastor’s kitchen, which became the first meeting place, became too small to hold the growing congregation: more prayer ensued. This time the prayer was for a building to house the budding congregation. Week after week the search went on for a place to worship. One day during prayer the Holy Spirit revealed in a vision that the space would be one big room in an office building. That is exactly where Bridges of Hope would finally have its first meeting, in an office building at 5 Mechanic Street, in Attleboro.

It was amazing how God provided for this new infant congregation. The one room in the office building was in the basement. It had housed a weight loss group that met several times a week. The woman that ran the group was a registered dietician and a very caring individual. The room was all set up with chairs, a podium, an overhead projector and screen, and it even had a desk and copy machine. Due to poor health the director of the program wanted to scale down her hours and suggested sub-letting the space. All we had to do is walk through the doors on Sunday morning with our Bibles and song books and we were ready to begin worship.

Over time the director would leave her meetings due to ill health and Bridges of Hope would take over her space. Over the next three or four years Bridges of Hope would expand and eventually take over the entire top floor of the building with its meeting rooms and office space. It was all part of God's expansion plan. To date, Bridges of Hope has occupied this building for eleven years.

From the very beginning, the mission of Bridges of Hope was focused on "Building bridges between people and God" and providing a "safe" place for people to come and reach their fullest potential in Christ.⁶ Over the years, no matter how many times we tried to change the vision or mission, God always brought the congregation back to its roots. Bridges of Hope has always ministered to a "high needs congregation" with individuals in spiritual recovery from a sinful world and life issues. On more than one occasion, the church has been referred to as "the emergency room for souls."

Ministering in The Salvation Army, one does not have to look very far for wounded, hurting people. There is hardly a day that goes by that a Salvation Army

⁶ Congregational Members of Bridges of Hope Ministry, Mission statement, created in June of 2000.

Officer⁷ or employee does not meet and minister to several individuals with varying needs. Those needs may range from food and shelter to assistance with heat and electric. Or it could be the need for prayer and a box of tissues to wipe away the tears as their stories unfold, or it could be a soul crying out to find his/her Savior to fill that longing within their heart. You never know what a day will bring. The very essence of The Salvation Army's mission is to provide the basics of life both temporally and spiritually, and that is why so many individuals and families come through their doors.

The congregation at Bridges of Hope was comprised of 40% male and 60% female. The ratio of singles to married couples was 25% married couples and 75 % singles: women, men and children. They came from all walks of life and occupations from mail carriers, a private investigator, retiring pastors, bankers, social workers, pharmacy tech and college placement counselors. A few are retired from working in the world but not for God. Some were well seasoned Christians when they joined us while others came in through the cross and received Christ at the Corps which then became their home church. Several of the individuals that are in the Corps have come through recovery. DJ⁸ came to us at Christmastime seeking a job ringing bell at a Red Kettle stand.⁹ He was using drugs and drinking. Dual addiction is common today. He started coming to church and surrendered his life to Christ. Today he is clean and sober, married and fulfilling the Great Commission. Another great example is Rose. Rose came in for counseling. She had been involved in a church that was bordering on a cult. She got set

⁷ Salvation Army Officers are ordained clergy.

⁸ All names have been changed to maintain the privacy of each individual.

⁹ Each Christmas The Salvation Army holds its Red Kettle Drive. Kettles, stands and signs are placed at stores in an effort to raise funds. When volunteers are scarce, bell ringers are hired. This also makes for a great ministry opportunity to those in need.

free through prayer and the Word and has been a pillar of the Corps for many years.

Rose also leads others to Christ and to the Corps.

One of the strongest participants in the group *lectio* and individual *lectio* projects for this thesis is Gloria. She came in with both hands and feet lodged in the frame of the doorway. She had been in a cult for over 20 years and was scared to death to leave. It took two years of the love of God and listening to the Word of Truth before she could let go completely and begin to trust. Today she is preaching, leading a Bible study and is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Many others have come into Bridges of Hope through social services. They come in when they are at their wits end. Many of the women and children are living in family shelters and secured shelters for battered women. Life has stripped them of their dignity and their daily needs. They live in fear that they will be found by their batterer. They want to come to Sunday Worship and other activities at the Corps, but they are petrified that they will be discovered and no longer will be safe. Many people have time constraints put on them due to the rules in the shelters. Many of the individuals are just so confused that they need to be taken by the hand, one step at a time, until they are stable enough to absorb what they are reading in the Word and hearing and experiencing at the Corps. Many need to learn to trust and to receive love.

Due to the economic downturn many people are hurting and depressed and don't know which way to turn. Love, food, and prayer help to ease their burdens, but it is the spiritual emptiness that really draws at our heart strings. When you see the vacant look in people's eyes when they are so lost and confused, it is a direct indicator that it is going to

take more than a bag of food to solve their problems. They need to be introduced to the one who came to fill that empty place inside, Jesus, the Living Word.

The Salvation Army is not like your average church. In fact, one of the biggest hindrances that we have is that people do not know that we are, in fact, a church. The name Salvation Army does not register in their minds as “salvation” pertaining to God. Most people think that we are a second-hand store or Good Will Industries.¹⁰ It is true that The Salvation Army has many second-hand clothing stores but the stores are run to raise money for the drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers and are totally separate from the Corps. When Pastor Warren and I would invite people to a worship service they would look at us like we had two heads. They would repeatedly cock their head to one side with a quizzical look and ask the same thing over and over again until we convinced them that The Salvation Army is a church and we hold worship services on Sunday like most other churches.

Another battle that we fight is the idea that The Salvation Army is only there to service the underprivileged, homeless and addicted individuals. That idea could not be further from the truth, but due to the nature of our ministry in helping people in need and fighting for those who are marginalized, it is easy to see why people view The Salvation Army in that way. Battling the pre-conceived ideas of who we are has been a constant struggle. Bridges of Hope has worked diligently to participate in the job of implementing community awareness. We have worked hard to make the community aware of all that The Salvation Army has to offer for their spiritual lives as well as their temporal lives. We are a church first and a social service agency second.

¹⁰ Goodwill Industries International is a not-for-profit organization that is funded by a massive network of retail thrift stores.

The Founding Father

The Salvation Army was founded in 1865 by William Booth. Booth had a heart for the lost and those impoverished in body and in spirit. He had been trained as a Methodist minister but broke away from the church due to their lack of support of his call to missions. William and his wife Catherine took a leap of faith and began to hold tent meetings, totally depending on God for everything. It did not take long before the Booths had led multitudes to Christ. William Booth did not set out to start a church but change lives through the power of Christ.

The people of England that lived during the post-industrial era were living in the worst of conditions, especially those in the East End of London.

Many descriptions of this area of London give the impression of it as a place of horror, a community of poverty, disease, and crime unmatched in the nineteenth century. Anyone walking through the East End at that time would witness the bleakest of living conditions and the utter disregard for human life and human values.¹¹

Homes were rat infested. Children became alcoholics by the time they were adolescents and sickness was rampant. “In the summer of 1866 eight thousand died, four thousand of them in the East End.”¹² The churches were not accepting of these people in their plight. Therefore, their spiritual life was, for the most part, non-existent. Booth had a firm resolve to reach these souls for Christ and improve their living conditions.

Because of his love for God and the people, Booth began to develop his own philosophy. He coined two mottos: “Heart to God-Hand to Man” and “Soup, Soap, and Salvation.” Both of these mottos would speak volumes with just a few words. Booth

¹¹ Roger Green, *The Life and Ministry of William Booth, Founder of The Salvation Army* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 106.

¹² Green, *The Life and Ministry of William Booth*, 106.

believed that before you could preach the Gospel to a hungry and hurting individual, you had to meet his or her basic life needs. When a person's basic needs are met they are able to be built up spiritually and receive the "Good News" of the Gospel.

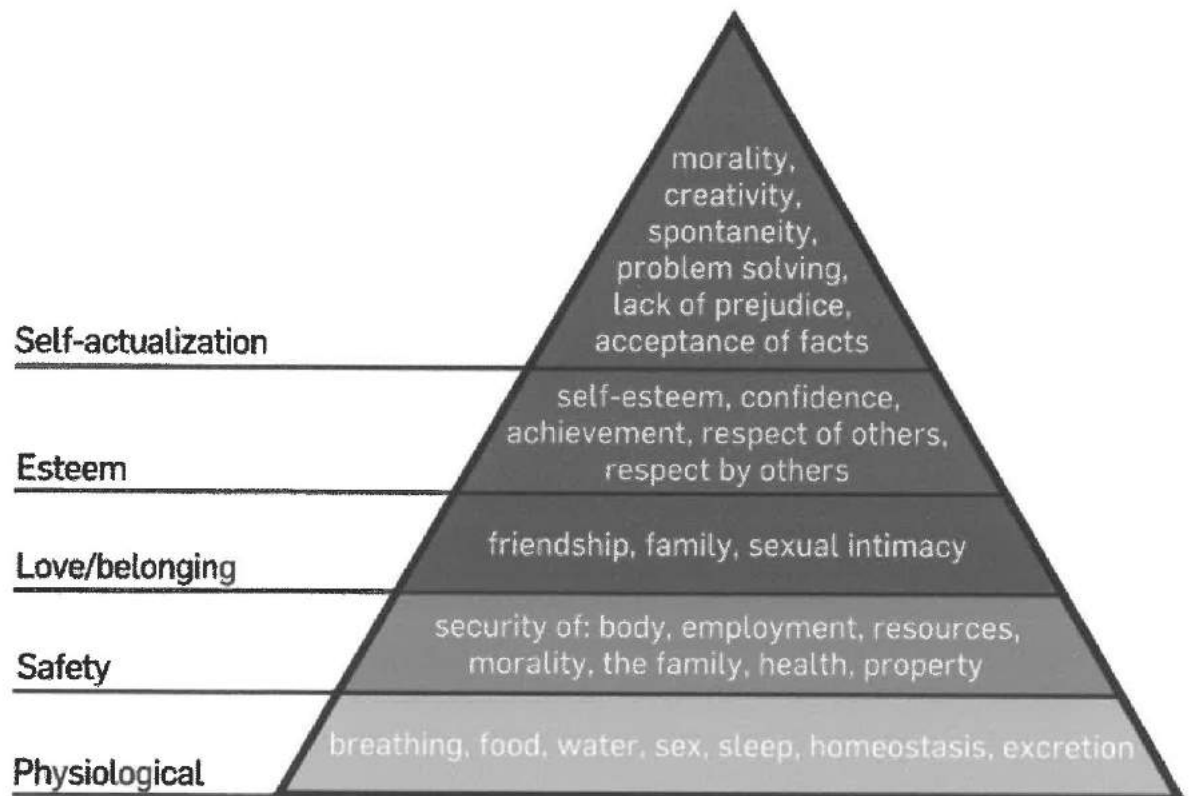
These mottos have directed us toward the greatest commandment found in Luke 10:27 to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind: and, Love your neighbor as yourself". This Scripture is just one example where the directive for Booth's mottos can be seen. With this *holistic* philosophy in hand, Booth won souls for Christ and met the needs of the people. Today The Salvation Army is ministering in 125 countries around the world. The Salvation Army's main focus, as it has always been, is the salvation of souls: the reconciliation of God and man, and to "meet human need without discrimination."¹³

There was another individual in history born about fifty years following the death of William Booth; he was a psychologist named Abraham Maslow. Maslow developed a graph called the Hierarchy of Needs.¹⁴

Maslow styled his graph in the shape of a pyramid. At the bottom of the pyramid Maslow placed the basic life needs of each person. As the pyramid builds Maslow displays the importance of order in which an individual's needs should be met. When all these needs have been met a person can "self actualize" which simply means that a person can reach self-fulfillment and be creative. The individual is then able to move beyond the realm of basic life needs into the more complex issues of living and thinking. Maslow, like Booth, believed that mankind can not move up the ladder of life if his basic life needs are not fulfilled.

¹³ Congregational Members of Bridges of Hope Ministry, Mission statement, June , 2000.

Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Source: Wikipedia, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's hierarchy of needs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs) [accessed July 10, 2009].

Booth, unlike Maslow, included a spiritual component to his *holistic* ministry. He was not just looking to fulfill man's temporal needs, although they are vitally important to sustain life, but he looked at the whole individual, body, soul, and spirit. In Matthew 5:6 Christ calls souls to be blessed if they "hunger and thirst for righteousness." He states that if they do, they "will be filled."

Many individuals that walk through the doors of a Salvation Army Corps have not had their basic needs met so that they can grow to their fullest potential in life. Souls come in through the doors wounded, hungry, confused and lost. As the church prepares

to hand out the soup and soap, they must also be ready to minister the saving grace of Jesus Christ. In order to be spiritually well each individual must be offered the basics of spiritual life and be encouraged to grow and mature in their journey toward Christlikeness. The foundation of the basics is the Word of God. Without the Word we can not know God as he would have us understand him. The scriptures are full of directives to read and study the Word. John 1:1 tells us that Jesus is the Word and that “the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Philippians 2:15-16 tells us that we will “shine like stars in the universe” as we “hold out the word of life.” The Word can restore life to those who are lost and hurting.

Spiritual formation is a process that can aid individuals on their spiritual journey. In his book *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation*, Mel Lawrenz states that “The ministry of the church is nothing less than the business of soul shaping.” By the grace of God we are included in the process of forming others. God had given us an awesome responsibility to carry out with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The heartbeat of spiritual formation is cultivating the spiritual needs of individuals, families, and faith communities. It is guiding others toward healing and reconciliation with Jesus Christ and aiding them in the process of becoming Christlike. Dallas Willard states in his book *Renovation of the Heart*, “Spiritual formation has now presented itself as a hopeful possibility for responding to the crying, unmet need of the human soul.”¹⁵ In the following poem it will be evidenced that without God, the human soul grows desperate.

¹⁵ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2002), 45.

Heal Me

"I'm standing at a crossroads-
Looking down the road to hell
To where I belong-
With all my failure and my sins
Heal me.

This feels just like dying-
Walking towards the dark side
Fighting to be free-
Have mercy on my soul.
Heal me.

In this desperate hour-
I grow tired and weary.
I'm down to one-
Nothing matters much when it's gone.
Heal me.

Someone has touched my face-
Now I can see the light.
Something inside is coming alive-
I can feel my own resurrection
Heal me.

I have let the light in-
It's time to begin again.
The sweet perfection-
The power of two
Heal me."¹⁶

Leigh Gardner

The words of this poem are the heart's cry of the multitudes today. Since the fall in the Garden of Eden we live in a world filled with brokenness. You only need to pick up the newspaper or turn on the television to be reassured that the world is being shaken to its core. In our society there is nothing left to the imagination and we do not possess a sense of wellness or stability. Our prisons are filled and our churches are dwindling. It is

¹⁶ Leigh Gardner, poem used with permission of author, 2007.

nearly impossible to get a bed in a psychiatric hospital if you need one and the lines at the unemployment office and the local food pantry grow longer and longer.

Since the 1940s we have lived in the “atomic generation” where bombs and our own social plight threaten to extinguish us at any moment. The general feeling is “live for today” because there is no guarantee that tomorrow will come. In his book, *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen coined the term “Nuclear Man.”¹⁷ Nuclear Man is in a dilemma of sorts; he knows how to create things as powerful as an atom bomb, but also knows that his creation could destroy the planet and all life on it. Nuclear man begins to sink into a state of ambivalence and does not have any idea what truth is. He searches for immortality but has nothing solid to base his search on since everything is so temporary. In his search for immortality Nuclear Man looks within his own self for answers and then to the world. Unfortunately he gains nothing but despair.

In this unstable environment hopelessness can set in when there is nowhere to turn. It is within this context that the modern world functions. Each day is lived on the brink of destruction and this generation continues to drift away from its spiritual roots. This combination is lethal to the human soul that is longing to be nourished and acknowledged. Things have not changed very much from the days of William Booth. We face the same challenges in 2012 as he faced 1865.

Our generation is crying out for healing and wholeness but too often their cries go unanswered. They are seeking but never finding. What they truly need is transformation through Jesus Christ. It is our fallen nature that plays the biggest role as we groan in agony for relief and the whole universe groans in agony until it is redeemed. Dallas Willard states the problem very plainly:

¹⁷ Henry Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 5.

We must see the soul and the person in its ruined condition with its malformed and dysfunctional mind, feelings, body, and social relations before we can understand that it must be delivered and reformed and how that can be done. One of the greatest obstacles to affective spiritual formation in Christ today is simple failure to understand and acknowledge the reality of the human situation as it affects Christians and non-Christians alike.¹⁸

The soul in its ruined condition needs liberation which will come when that soul is reunited with its Savior, Jesus Christ. Willard states that our “hearts” need to be renovated.¹⁹ We have been formed by the world and all that we have been exposed to. What the human soul needs is to be shaped by Christ. It is like the old saying “you are what you eat.”²⁰ What you feed your body helps to determine what physical shape you are in. In the same light, what we put into our hearts and minds and what we have been exposed to, forms us. It is time to put the process of formation into the hands of the One who formed us, Almighty God. He is willing and able to bring transformation into our hearts and lives if we let him.

If the soul is to undergo a metamorphosis, there are pertinent issues and questions that must be addressed. First, the church needs to be active and present during this time of change and must strongly consider offering and implementing the spiritual disciplines for “soul shaping” to occur. An important question arises: is today’s church equipped to meet the basic spiritual needs of individuals? The Barna Group, in an article that addresses the issue of church attendees and leaders inability to define spiritual maturity, says that even though America may possess huge structures for worship they do not possess the ability to nurture human spirituality amongst their members. One of the biggest reasons is that they lack a basic understanding of spiritual maturity themselves

¹⁸ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 45.

¹⁹ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 10.

²⁰ Quote: Dr. Victor Hugo Lindlahr (1895-1969) Pioneering American health food advocate.

and so can not pass it on to others. The Barna Group also states that there are five issues that must be dealt with; the first being that most Christians think spirituality is following rules. The second issue is: most Christians attending church do not hear a clear voice from the church regarding spiritual formation and number three: many Christians don't understand personal spiritual maturity. Fourth, many pastors do not possess an understanding of personal spiritual maturity either so they put programs over deepening their spirituality. This issue has been an increasing problem in The Salvation Army for many years and consequently The Salvation Army tends to be very program oriented. The fifth and final issue is that leaders are vague with their scriptural references.²¹ The *Word* and the message that is going fourth are weakening and therefore not giving a strong guiding light to those in the darkness.

The second issue is that Pastors and leaders must be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the congregation and the congregation or participants must be willing to be open to change and growth. If the pastors and congregations are not open to the leading of the Spirit and to change, there can be a huge stumbling block before them that needs to be dealt with. Being confronted with the Gospel is always life changing for the individual and for the congregation. It is like ripples in a pond. As each individual changes it affects the entire body.

A question that continually arises within the context of transformation is, can transformation take place within the context of our busy and very loud life styles? Is it possible for individuals and groups to come aside and be quiet before the Lord so that they can hear and encounter Him?

²¹ Barna Group 2009. Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity. <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/> [accessed August 12, 2010].

Richard Foster, in his book *Streams of Living Water*, demonstrates the different avenues or streams that the Church has taken.²² Foster places The Salvation Army into the Social Justice stream; feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, fighting the war against sin, and righting the wrongs of this world. It is a ministry that has been founded on compassion and the love of Christ. With such a war being waged against evil, where do pastors make room for the spiritual disciplines to appear and be practiced?

And finally, when the opportunity for spiritual nourishment and growth are offered, how many individuals will actually receive what Christ has for them and allow a spiritual metamorphosis to take place? The results of two out of the three projects in Chapter four: one on the individual practice of *lectio divina* and one on group Bible study, the *100 Day Challenge*, will reveal the all too familiar numbers that are declining among those in our congregations that do not continue in the study of the Word. This is a problem of paramount importance because it is the Word that delivers life and truth to us. It is the *Word* that brings transformation whether spoken or read.

Ancient Practice-Ancient Problem

The ancient art of *lectio divina* or Divine Reading is the prayerful reading of the Scriptures that enables the Word of God to become a means of bringing individuals into union with God or Christ. This practice was developed over the centuries primarily by monks and desert monastics. In the beginning the practice of *lectio divina* began as an oral tradition due to the lack of books and the low level of literacy. The Scriptures were

²² Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Harper Collins 1998).

Richard Foster celebrates the major traditions of the church in this book. He demonstrates that even though the church is diverse in its thinking and operation it is like streams flowing and merging rather than separate distinct entities. All the streams are necessary to carry out God's purpose.

read, heard, and ruminated upon. For centuries this practice was a primary foundation in the life of the church but over time began to wane. As of late, *lectio divina* is experiencing a resurgence or revival. There are many groups as well as individuals that are practicing *lectio divina* and there are many authors that have begun to fill the bookshelves with their works on this important practice. It is very exciting to know that we have another wonderful tool for spiritual growth.

Many authors like Dallas Willard and Eugene Peterson have richly delved into the field of spiritual formation and transformation. Willard alone has authored and co-authored several books such as his well known works, *Renovation of the Heart and Spirit of the Disciplines*,²³ where he emphasizes the need for spiritual transformation beginning at the center, the heart. He believes that in order to be changed one must get to the root of the problem, our state of sinfulness and separation from God. Willard challenges today's Christians to begin a deeper walk with Christ, one that will bear fruit: fruit that will last. Peterson calls us into conversation with the *Word* of God in *Eat This Book: a conversation in the art of spiritual reading*²⁴ and in his work *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: a conversation in spiritual theology*.²⁵ He challenges us to unite our every day life in the practical living out of our faith and Christian beliefs that are found in and based on the Word. He creates a rhythm of life between the created and the Creator that makes sense to the reader and urges individuals to take the plunge into deeper waters of spiritual life in Christ.

²³ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understand how God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper Collins), 1988.

²⁴ Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 2006.

²⁵ Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 2005.

Ruth Haley Barton, in her book *Sacred Rhythms*,²⁶ leads individuals to the quieting of their souls and helps to disengage us from the busyness of the world. She calls for transformation in the solitude and silence that we need to help us enter the holy space that gives life and refreshment to the weary of the world. Michael Casey in his work, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*,²⁷ also call us to the quieting of our daily lives. He calls individuals to a place of calm. He instructs the soul that it is in the calm, not the clamor of life, that enlightenment comes. Although Casey calls for calm he does let the reader know that when progressing in a spiritual journey through *lectio*, one must reach out beyond their comfort zone.

Thelma Hall in her book *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*²⁸ helps people do just that, rediscover the ancient art. She describes *lectio divina* as a hidden treasure that is just waiting to be discovered. Basil Pennington in his book *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures*,²⁹ not only takes us back to the ancient practice but projects us forward into current time with the use of *lectio* in cyberspace. Connection with the Word can be made on line with the new tools available to us through the web. We can carry our Bibles with us everywhere in our electronic devices.

Richard Foster, a Christian theologian and author from the Quaker tradition, has published many works on the topic of spiritual formation. He is a former professor at Friends University and also has pastored in Evangelical Friends churches. Foster's most

²⁶ Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity), 2006.

²⁷ Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Missouri: Liguori/Triumph), 1996.

²⁸ Thelma Hall, *Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (New Jersey: Paulist Press), 1988.

²⁹ M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York, New York: Crossroads), 1998.

famous work is *Celebration of Discipline* which was published in 1978. This book was named one of the top ten books of the twentieth century by *Christianity Today* and has sold over one million copies.

In 1988 Foster began Renovaré which is a Christian non-profit organization that is dedicated to helping individuals and churches grow in their Christlikeness by engaging in the practices of spiritual formation in an intentional way. Renovaré encourages people to develop a balanced vision of Christian faith and witness that draws on the experience of the whole church, encompasses all denominations, and flows throughout Christian history.

It is Foster's works that began to show up at the seminars and meetings of The Salvation Army. Spiritual formation was introduced as a new topic or avenue of gaining spirituality. Spiritual formation was like a child peeking through a doorway seeing who would notice that she was around or like an arrow pointing people in the right direction. Books on spiritual formation help people begin to become acquainted with the disciplines. They call for individuals and groups to consider quieting their spirits in this noisy world and perhaps open their minds and hearts to the practice of *lectio divina*.

The Salvation Army has begun to introduce the basics of spiritual formation to its churches via seminars and workshops. The School for Officer Training in Suffern, New York has begun to incorporate spiritual formation into the personal practices of their Cadets.³⁰ Each Cadet is given materials at the beginning of the school year. They are to read the materials and have daily private devotions. The Cadets are also required to attend weekly small group meetings with a group that has been designated by the faculty

³⁰ The School for Officer Training is the Seminary of The Salvation Army. Cadets are current seminary students working toward graduation and ordination.

at the Training School. At the beginning of each year they must sign a covenant stating that they promise to come each week prepared to share what God has taught them in their personal study of the Bible and lesson materials. The desire is that the Cadets grow in mutual accountability, in mutual submission, in the application of Scriptural truth, and in the desire to become more Christlike. They also agree to pray for one another and to keep all things shared in confidence which creates a safe environment to share with one another. They also are challenged to be open with one another so that they can be authentic and “enter relationships where they are known, loved, accepted and challenged.” They enter this covenant with “God’s help.”³¹

Lectio divina, as so named, has not been one of the disciplines introduced in The Salvation Army. Even though Spiritual Formation is studied, not all denominations are familiar with the practice of *lectio divina*. Due to its deep Roman Catholic roots, not all denominations are willing to cross the denominational boundaries to discover the beauty of this practice. It may well be that this revival must be in the hands of pioneer spirited individuals that are called to have an open heart and mind as they follow the path of spiritual formation.

Semantics play a role in introducing new spiritual practices. The word “spiritual” can conjure up many thoughts, especially in this generation, and can have New Age nuances or demonic nuances. We must be careful when using the word “spiritual” to describe our journey toward Christ. Likewise, *lectio divina* may be a term that is a stretch for some pastors and congregations. It is vital that pastors and congregations keep an open mind when using terminology. Words can become a block to the practices

³¹ Tenets of The School for Officer Training Spiritual Formation are used with permission of the School for Officer Training, Suffern, New York.

that can advance souls in their union with Christ. *Lectio divina* may be introduced as Divine Reading or prayerful reading of the scriptures or meditating on the scriptures. It is entirely possible to introduce the practice of *lectio divina* and maintain its integrity without using theological terms that people are not yet familiar with. This issue will be discussed further in Chapters three and four.

When introducing *lectio divina* it is good practice to have a thorough introductory session with all those that are going to be participants in the group. This will give the leader of the group opportunity to answer questions and give a good historical and theological background of the practice. The introductory materials that were used in the studies for this thesis will be discussed in Chapter four. The materials were presented to each participant in the study prior to any actual practice of *lectio divina*. You may also want to share the findings of current groups that are practicing *lectio divina* with any new individuals or groups that you are coaching. This can be an encouragement to seasoned veterans as well as new participants.

Beginnings are just that, beginnings. Each person and each group must start somewhere. The introduction to a closer walk with Christ must be taken one step at a time. We live in an instant generation that would like to have everything now. Waiting is not a word that is high on their list of priorities, but to gain Christ, to gain the good things of God, we must be patient and have searching hearts. Relationships with Christ, as with others, are forged through time.

Two *lectio* groups were formed at Bridges of Hope. The first was a group study that met on Wednesdays at noon. It began as a prayer group and when *lectio divina* was introduced it took on a new dimension. The participants began to plumb the depths of the

Word together. It was their searching hearts that opened the door for the participants and allowed them to move forward and grow. It was their searching hearts that were willing to go beyond the norm to gain Christ. Some of these searching hearts had been formed by a cold and godless generation and by deceitful men claiming to be representatives of God. A spark from the Holy Spirit that was lit in their hearts drew them to search for the truth, not the truth that the world gives us, but the Living Truth, the Way the Truth and the Life, Jesus Christ. As this group plumbed the depths of scripture together they also journaled the scriptures and their heart felt findings. The act of journaling enabled the group to look back over what Jesus had revealed to them and produced findings that will be seen in Chapter four.

Individuals in the second *lectio* study participated in daily scripture readings from Eugene Peterson's *The Message Solo*.³² This daily devotional has been designed to encourage the reading of scripture in the style of *lectio divina*. Peterson gives an introduction to *lectio* in the beginning of the book. Hearts and lives were changed during that six month period. But, as the findings will show, only twenty percent of the participants continued with the project. The participants that continued with the daily readings were changed, as will be evidenced in the findings in Chapter four. Those that did not continue have sought other paths in their walk with Christ.

Each soul must make his or her choice. When Jesus met the Samaritan Woman in John 4, he proclaimed that all who partake of earthly water will thirst again but those who drink of the water that Jesus gives will never thirst. When the search of the human soul begins, the thirst that is created calls us to a closeness and intimacy with Christ. The woman at the well received what Jesus had for her and did not stop there. She ran into

³² Eugene Peterson, *The Message Solo* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press 2007).

town and shared her testimony with everyone and urged them to come and see for themselves. Her voice echoes to this day, calling us to come and see for ourselves. We cannot experience change and come closer to Christ by osmosis. There must be steps taken to move forward.

Just as Bridges of Hope was called into being to “build bridges between people and God,” the practice of *lectio divina* can be a bridge that will build intimacy with God and allow the reader or hearer the opportunity to have a life changing encounter with the Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ. When a soul encounters Christ he/she becomes a new creation. When a soul determines to push on and encounter Christ through the Word that soul continues to be changed and formed. The Word is confrontational and each time it is read it challenges the soul that reads it. The confrontational nature of the Word causes people to take an inward glance at their own lives. This inward glance acts as a reflective mirror to the soul. Change will come when people continue to meditate on the Word with the desired end result being Christlikeness.

James Wilhoit in his book *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, states that “Spiritual formation is the task of the church. Period.”³³ Wilhoit states that spiritual formation is not an option but “is at the heart of its whole purpose for existence.”³⁴ Wilhoit explores the ministry of discipleship but continues to plead his case for the church’s role in forming the Body of Christ, not just through discipleship, but by spiritual advancement.

It is unfortunate that the church is often devoid of the skills needed to help the hungering and thirsting souls to find the cool refreshing drink of the Spirit that is needed.

³³ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2008), 15.

³⁴ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 15.

The church of this generation has turned to programs instead of the Master himself.

Wilhoit says, “The fact remains that spiritual formation has not been the priority in the North American church that it should be.”³⁵ He goes on to give an example that resonates with Booth and Maslow:

A safe food supply, clean drinking and recreational waters, sanitation, and widespread vaccinations have improved the quality of our life. These interventions have eliminated diseases like smallpox and polio. These advances, and scores more, are part of the fruit of the public health movement that came to fruition in the twentieth century. I take many of these for granted, assuming that they are just part of life, but in many parts of the world they are not widely present. Currently 25,000 children die every year from measles, a disease easily prevented through vaccinations. We take for granted public health initiatives of the last century that have had measurable, positive social benefits. In medicine, the two tasks of prevention and cure must work hand in hand. Cures may provoke media attention and buzz; however, it is the preventative and public health interventions that generally provide the real ‘bang for your buck.’ Likewise, spiritual formation makes its greatest contribution through quiet, hardly noticeable, behind-the-scenes work that places an emphasis on ‘prevention’ and equipping rather than just on crisis interventions or headline-grabbing public conferences and programs.³⁶

Just as every human being needs clean water and safe food, they also need to be spiritually fed with the Word of God. The Word of God is healing and restorative. It can and does transform lives. It would be a wonderful thing if the *Word* was applied in advance like the life saving inoculations that children receive in infancy.

As you turn to the scriptures, Psalm 1 is a great example to follow. It is first in the Psalms and sets the tone of all the others. It gives a clear cut choice to be blessed, healthy, and productive spiritually: or to wither and die. It is the man that meditates on the law of the Lord, day and night, that becomes like a tree that is fed and flourishes. It is the precepts of the Lord and his Word that brings life:

³⁵ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 16.

³⁶ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 16.

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1:1-6)

In Deuteronomy 30:19 God calls us to choose life. “This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live”. The congregation at Bridges of Hope is encouraged to choose life and to move on from their place of beginning to deepen their relationship with Christ. There must be a foundation for that path that they are taking and that foundation is the theology that lies before them in the biblical principles and truths that can assure them that they are walking in the right direction.

In the Salvation Army the Scriptures are held to be the basis of Christian living. Doctrine one states, “We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.”³⁷ The bottom line is that the scriptures hold the truth for a Salvationist. There is a hymn that found its way into *The Songbook of The Salvation Army*.³⁸ It is hymn # 652, *Holy Bible Book Divine*. This hymn makes a very powerful statement and further defines The Salvation Army’s stand on scripture:

³⁷ Colonel Milton S. Agnew (R), *the Manual of Salvationism: For Instructors* (USA 1978), vii.

³⁸ The Songbook of The Salvation army is equivalent to a hymnal in other denominations.

Holy Bible, book Divine,
Precious treasure, thou art mine;
Mine to tell me whence I came;
Mine to teach me what I am.

Mine to call me when I rove;
Mine to show a Saviour's love;
Mine art thou to guide my feet;
Mine to judge, condemn, acquit.

Mine to comfort in distress;
If the Holy Spirit bless;
Mine to show, by living faith,
Man can triumph over death.

Mine to tell of joys to come,
And the rebel sinner's doom;
Holy Bible, book Divine,
Precious treasure, thou art mine.

John Burton, Sr.³⁹

Moving Forward

Chapter two will move us into the theological framework that supports this work. Theology is the study of God and Christian theology is an attempt to understand God as he is revealed in Scripture. In the introduction of the Gospel of Luke 1:1-4, Doctor Luke, a highly educated man, sets out to tell us that he is writing to give us a true and complete story of Jesus life:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

³⁹ John Burton, Sr. was born in Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, England in 1773. He was a Baptist layman and helped complete the Nottingham Sunday School Union Hymn Book in 1810. The hymnal went through 20 editions over the next half century. Burton died in June of 1822.

Luke has carefully checked things out and made a decision to write an “orderly” account for Theophilus so that Theophilus will know the “certainty” of the things he was taught. Luke wanted proper documentation so that the readers would have a firm foundation to stand on. He wanted to strengthen the reader’s faith and reassure them. As we search through the Scriptures we can create a solid foundation from which we will have a strong vantage point to work from. A person can not be easily swayed from their stand when their foundation is strong, and when you have a firm footing, you can move deeper into the text and deeper into a spiritual place with God.

Chapter two will begin by laying a foundation through the Trinity. It is through this lens that Christianity sees Jesus and can stand on the efficacy of his sacrifice for us. From there we will move into the realm of the written Word and the Word Incarnate: exploring the deity of Jesus and the power of the written Word in our lives today. This chapter will close with a look at how a vehicle such as *lectio divina* can connect mankind to his Creator through the Incarnate Word. God’s love for us is transformative but we must connect with it and receive it for it to take effect.

Chapter three will reveal the heartbeat and voice of the authors that have given their time and talent to share with humanity their thoughts and findings on the various topics related to the materials in this work.

Chapter four reveals the design and content of the thesis projects, such as, introducing *lectio divina* to groups and individuals and the implementation of group Bible studies. The participants in the studies reveal their experiences with *lectio divina* and their subsequent relationship with the Word in their journals and interview sessions. The

Bible study groups contribute by sharing their experiences through surveys and interviews.

Chapter five reveals the findings of this work. The question being, what has transpired in the lives of the individuals that have participated in the project studies? Are they changed? Will they continue on their own when the studies are completed?

As we enter Chapter two, I urge you to let the knowledge of the theology that is presented mix with the heart of the Spirit who ministers life to all. Allister McGrath, in his book *Understanding the Trinity*,⁴⁰ believes that we need to think about God as someone we can encounter. He states, “God isn’t an idea we can kick about in seminar rooms, he is a living reality who enters into our experience and transforms it.”⁴¹ Let God enter your experience as you learn about him.

⁴⁰ Allister McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 1990.

⁴¹ McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity*, 13.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The term theology, in today's English, is translated from the Greek word *theologia*. *Theologia* is derived from two words, *theos* meaning deity or God and *logia* meaning discourse. Christian theology is an attempt to understand God as he is revealed in the Bible. Because his ways are higher than our ways, (paraphrase Isaiah 55: 9b) no one will ever know everything about God. The Doxology in Romans 11:33-36 speaks to this realization, "Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God would repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen". Although, we might never know everything about God, when we enter the Word we can learn what God has revealed about himself. It is amazing that the God that created the universe allows us to know him so intimately. It is our ability to have access to the God of creation that makes the difference in a shattered life.

Theology also helps the people of God gain knowledge of who we are as his creation and what he desires for us. Today, many people that come into The Salvation Army are spiritually bankrupt or are in a state of spiritual deprivation. As stated in Chapter one, there are many un-churched people so they have no foundation to build on. The church must endeavor to begin to help each person build a foundation in the Word so

that they have a solid base to work from. In Matthew 7:24-27 Jesus gives us a wonderful example in the parable of The Wise and Foolish Builders:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

When we study the Word we can begin to understand God's precepts and what he requires of us. The love that God pours out on his people calls us to a heartfelt experience of loving God back. It calls us to a place of worship and adoration and lifts us to another level. It also gives us courage to take the inward glance into our hearts where real change begins to take place.

Theology can take us many places: to discovery, to comfort, to discipline, to repentance, and to a place of profound awe. This will not happen unless we undertake the actual discipline of study. 2 Timothy 2:15 tells us, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth".

Keeping Our Balance

Eugene Peterson, in his book *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*,¹ shares his view on theology. He states, "Theology is the attention that we give to God, the effort we give to knowing God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and in Jesus Christ. Spiritual' is the insistence that everything that God reveals of himself and his works is capable of

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 2005.

being lived by ordinary men and women in their homes and workplaces.”² Peterson beautifully demonstrates for us the need for balance between theology and spirituality. It is all about relationship. He says, “The two words need each other, for we know how easy it is for us to let our study of God get separated from the way we live; we also know how easy it is to let our desires to live whole and satisfying lives (spiritual lives) get disconnected from who God actually is and the ways he works among us.” He states that “Spiritual theology is lived theology.”³ As seekers of knowledge, a balance must be maintained to safeguard our reading from becoming intellectual and not allowing the Word to enter our hearts and bring change. Reading and learning about God must not be separated from the lived reality that God is our Creator and the giver of life. As Christians, our relationship with God is as vital as the air we breathe. The body of Christ must take the initiative to actively participate in the ongoing story of our theology. In order to dance with God we must first understand the steps.

In the case of our spiritual health, ignorance is not bliss. Because many individuals do not possess knowledge of the Bible or who they are in relationship with their Creator, the steps must be taught. Churches and individuals must be intentional in their quest to know God. Pastors and lay leaders have the responsibility to teach the basic steps of how to read and study the Word. As the basics are taught new insights are gained. It is like the steady rain on a dry piece of ground. Drop by drop the water enters the soil and moistens it. It can bring dry, hard, cracked ground, together again and cause new life to spring up where drought had previously choked the life out of all of the vegetation. Using *lectio divina* as a medium to bring the Word to the un-watered soil of

² Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 5.

³ Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 5.

the human heart, works. Other benefits of *lectio* are: it can be practiced individually or in groups, which fosters a sense of having a one on one relationship with God or a sense of community and it is accessible to a busy generation.

Laying the Foundation-The Trinity

When a person begins the process of spiritual formation moving toward transformation, they must understand that for Christians it is a Trinitarian event. The Trinity is the central dogma of Christian Theology. The word Trinity is derived from the Latin *Trinitas* meaning number three or triad. Although Trinity is not a word that is found in scripture, it is a word that the Church has used for centuries to describe what is evidenced in the scriptures.

The word Trinity was first used by Tertullian in the early 3rd century. Around 325 the First Council of Nicaea established the doctrine of the Trinity. Out of this council the Nicene Creed was adopted. Soon after the Council of Nicaea, additional formulas of faith were composed, most of them variations of the Nicene Creed. Many of the debates arising in the councils were prompted by the controversies sparked by movements such as Arianism. Arianism taught that the Father was a superior and distinct being from the Son and that the Son was a superior and distinct being from the Holy Spirit. The Council of Nicaea had stated that the Son is of the same being as the Father. This was to be further developed to the formula of three persons, one being; adding the Holy Spirit.

Millard Erickson in his book *Christian Theology*,⁴ states in his section on the Trinity, "It was at the Council of Constantinople (381) that there emerged a definitive statement in which the church made explicit the beliefs which had been held implicitly.

⁴ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985).

The view which prevailed was basically that of Athanasius (2393-373), as it was elaborated and refined by the Cappadocian theologians-Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa.”⁵ “The formula which expresses the position of Constantinople is ‘one in three’.”⁶ Erickson explains that the emphasis often seems to be put more on the separate existence of the three persons rather than on the one indivisible Godhead but goes on to explain that the one Godhead exists simultaneously in three modes of being or hypostases: hypostasis being: one God existing in three distinct persons. For example, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three distinct (hypostasis) in one God. “The idea of ‘coinherence’ or, as later termed, perichoresis of the persons, is emphasized. The Godhead exists ‘undivided in divided persons’.”⁷ There is an identity of nature in the three hypostases. Erickson further explains that each of the individual hypostases are the ousia, (Greek for: being, substance, nature , essence) of the Godhead distinguished by the characteristics or properties peculiar to him, just as individual humans have unique characteristics which distinguish them from other individual human persons.

It is vitally important as Christians that we have a basic understanding of our faith. The Council of Nicea came against Arianism but today there are modern day groups that would teach against the Trinity, for example, the Jehovah’s Witnesses. This group, founded in the United States, rejects the doctrine of the Trinity. They teach a doctrine that is similar to that of Arius. They teach that Christ is the Son of God, a special being, created by God before the beginning of time but not equal with God. One of the major building blocks of Christianity is the Incarnation, the fact that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh. If Jesus is not God than his death on the cross is of no effect for

⁵ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 235.

⁶ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 336.

⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 336.

our salvation. In the book of Colossians Paul is writing from prison in Rome. Epaphras had come to Rome and told Paul that there were false teachers in Colosse that were telling people that their Christian faith was incomplete. Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians to oppose the false teachers. He reminded them that Jesus is supreme over everything and that his death is all we need to save us from our sins:

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. (Colossians 1:15-23)

It is important that we walk and live in the fullness of what Christ has done for us and who he is. The Christian Fathers fought over terms and words because it was vitally important. Christians today need to know the basics so that they are not dragged into false teaching and led into cults due to lack of knowledge. Again, if the foundation is not strong it will crumble beneath you.

We also must have proper knowledge of the Trinity because it is involved in every aspect of our Christian walk and lives: in our worship, liturgy, and prayer as well as in our personal relationships with others. Sadly to say, if you ask many Christians today what their beliefs are founded on, they could not tell you. Back in 1950 and 1960 many

Christians were pulled into cults of various kinds because they had no real understanding of their faith. They were brought up in church because their parents brought them each week. Their faith was passed down from generation to generation but no real personal experience had taken place. There is a Christian cliché that speaks to this situation: “God has no grandchildren, just children.” We can not base our faith and beliefs on others or by just showing up in the pew on Sunday morning. We must come to “know” God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit: the fullness of the Godhead.

The Salvation Army, being “an evangelical part of the universal Christian church,” as stated in their statement of faith, is Trinitarian in their belief. The third doctrine of their faith states: “We believe that there are three persons in the godhead—the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.”⁸ The Trinity is very important in their belief and their teachings. Over the years the Trinity has taken a back seat in many churches. Fred Sanders in his book, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*,⁹ as well as James R. White in his book, *The Forgotten Trinity*,¹⁰ challenge the evangelical community to rise up to the occasion of re-visiting the Trinity in every area of their Christianity. Both Sanders and White claim that the Trinity has taken a back seat and that even though we claim to be Trinitarian in our belief we have given way to a state of sleepiness in our understanding of the Trinity and not allowed the fullness of the Trinity to be operable in our lives. Sanders and White bring up the fact that we must have a working knowledge of the Trinity but we must also have a personal encounter with the Trinity. If we leave out any

⁸ *Manual of Salvationism*, vii.

⁹ James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House), 1998.

¹⁰ Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton: Crossway), 2010.

part of the Trinity in our walk we will be missing a great deal and will become unbalanced. White makes a statement in his work that brought the writer's heart to attention. He says, "Upon reflection, we discover that the Trinity is the highest revelation God has made of himself to His people."¹¹ If God purposed to give the revelation of the Trinity to us, then we need to keep it in focus in our theological understanding, as well as in our lived experience.

A foundation has now been laid that can be built upon. It is time to narrow the focus to reveal the central thrust of what this work is based upon: transformation through the Word of God via *lectio divina*. It is because of the *Word* that we may enter that sacred place with God. It is the Ancient Art of *lectio divina* that will provide the vehicle to aid us in entering the Word and move toward the ultimate goal, union with God. The history of the written Word will again lay a foundation for us to build upon as we arrive at the Gospel of John which holds a major key for Christians. John, in his Gospel, boldly states, "The Word was God". (1:1)

The Written Word

In the Pentateuch, in Exodus 20, the scriptures reveal the story of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai. These Commandments were spoken by God and would be written on stone tablets. Today we might say that something has been "written in stone," which would mean that it was permanent and unchangeable. God put his Commandments in a state of permanence. Sr. Evelyn Schumacher, in her book,

¹¹ White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, 14.

Presence Through The Word,¹² states, “The Decalogue and the various codes of the covenant were not just collections of impersonal legislation, but they were the dynamic utterance of God expressed in human language. It was Yahweh’s intent to impart Wisdom to His people by putting them in direct contact with His own thoughts regarding their relationship to Him and one another.”¹³

As time passed, for the Jews and even in many churches today, tradition would be elevated to the level of Scripture. God had most definitely put his words in written form for a reason. The Lord clearly demonstrated that these words or Commandments were not to be tampered with but were to be followed. No tradition, group of people, or congregation, can supersede God’s Word.

The revealed Word of God, and nothing else, would be the authority in Judaism. This alone was the standard of truth delivered to them by God himself. It would be the written record of God’s Word that would become the basis for God’s covenant with the nation. In Exodus 24:4 it is written that “Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said”. Verse 7 reveals that Moses “took the book of the covenant and read it to the people. They responded, ‘We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey’”. It is obvious throughout Scripture that Israel was not obedient and needed God to direct them.

In the New Testament, Paul reveals to us in the pastoral letter of II Timothy, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ

¹² Sr. Evelyn Ann Schumacher, O.S. F. *Presence Through the Word* (New York: Living Flame Press), 1983.

¹³ Schumacher, *Presence Through the Word*, 59.

Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (3:14-17). Just as Moses passed down the written Word of God to the people and commanded them to follow it, likewise, Paul in a pastoral manner instructs the people that the Holy Scriptures are "God-breathed". They equip us for salvation and every work. It is fortunate for us today that God initiated writing the Word. We can, at any time, pick up our Bibles and read about God and how he reveals himself to us and instructs us. We may commune with God through his Word because his Word is alive and able to produce change within the heart of mankind. Below are two illustrations of the heart change that man can undergo when exposed to the Word.

Saint Augustine

"Tolle Lege"
"Take up and read"

So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighboring house a voice as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating, 'Take up and read; Take up and read.' Instantly, my countenance altered, I began to think most intently whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words: nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be not other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. For I had heard of Anton, that coming in during the reading of the Gospel, he received the admonition, as if what was being read was spoken to him; go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me: and by such oracle he was converted unto Thee. Eagerly then I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I laid the volume of the apostle when I arose thence. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence. No further

would I read; no needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.¹⁴

This quote from Saint Augustine reveals the transforming power of the Word when it is read and taken into the human heart and soul. There is nothing left to the imagination when you read the life of St. Augustine. He was trapped in the grip of sin when God began to deal with his heart. He had a concubine and an illegitimate son and he had struggled greatly with his lustful lifestyle without being able to be free from it. In the end it was the Word of God that had the power to convert Augustine. It was while he read Romans 13: 13-14 that he was converted. The scripture says, “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature”. St. Augustine gave his heart and life to God that day and he would become one of the great theologians of the Church. The Word of God can save the greatest of sinners and transform the hardest hearts.

Eugene Peterson in his book, titled *Eat This Book*, states: “The Christian Scriptures are the primary text for Christian Spirituality: Christian spirituality is rooted in and shaped by the scriptural text. It is the Holy Spirit that helps us to put the scriptures together in a meaningful way to reveal the full picture that God has chosen to reveal to us.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Augustine of Hippo, Saint, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (BookSurge Classics: Title No. 400, 2002), 139.

¹⁵ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 15.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther, the great reformer, is another man of God that was transformed through the reading of the Word. Born in Germany in 1483, Luther became a monk at the age of 21 after being struck to the ground by lightening during a severe thunderstorm. Luther interpreted this event as a sign that he should enter the monastery:

On a sutry day in July of the year 1505 a lonely traveler was trudging over a parched road on the outskirts of the Saxon village of Stotternheim. He was a young man, short but sturdy, and wore the dress of a university student. As he approached the village, the sky became overcast. Suddenly there was a shower, then a crashing storm. A bolt of lightning rived the gloom and knocked the man to the ground. Struggling to rise, he cried in terror, 'St. Anne help me.! I will become a monk.'¹⁶

R.C. Sproul, in his book *The Holiness of God*, describes Luther's life and his extraordinary devotion as a monk. "As a monk, Luther devoted himself to a rigorous kind of austerity. He set out to be the perfect monk. He fasted for days and indulged in severe forms of self-flagellation. He went beyond the rules of the monastery in matters of self-denial. His prayer vigils were longer than anyone else's. He refused the normal allotment of blankets and almost froze to death."¹⁷ Luther lived his life trying to earn his way to heaven. Although he was steadfast in his religious practices he found no peace within himself. All he could focus on was his lack of righteousness and a perpetual vision of eternal punishment, so he continued to abuse his body all the more. Eventually sickness overtook him and he was forced to leave the monastery and was sent to Wittenberg University to become a professor. It was here that Luther would discover the saving grace of God.

¹⁶ Ronald H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon-colesbury 1991).

¹⁷ R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness Of God* (Illinois: Tyndale House 1998), 83.

Working toward his doctorate and desiring to be a good teacher, Luther began to study the scriptures in a deeper way. In the fashion of Psalm 1:2 he began to meditate on God's law day and night. He became like the tree planted by streams of water that would become fruitful. As Luther began a study in the book of Romans, Galatians, Hebrews and the Psalter, something began to stir within. Could it be that the righteousness of God is not earned but received by grace? The book of Romans spelled it out clearly for him. "But now righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (3:21-22). Luther's eyes were forever opened to the grace of God. He had a spiritual breakthrough.

Luther's eyes were not only opened to the grace of God but he began to believe that the church was corrupt. He now experienced that the church was a community of believers not just an institution passed down by apostolic succession. He realized that acts of humility sprung from the gift of grace not from trying to obtain grace. He would now direct others to follow the promises of God instead of the dictates of the Catholic Church. Following the nailing his 95 Thesis to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, revolution broke out. Europe and the world would never be the same.

It was meditating on the Word day and night and seeking God that brought revelation and change to the heart and soul of Martin Luther. God revealed his grace and love to a weary monk seeking truth. The Word of God can and will deliver if we will just enter in and allow it to penetrate our soul.

While reading the Scriptures it is good to remember that the "whole council of God" is needed if one is to remain balanced. It is dangerous and presumptuous to pick

and choose isolated scriptures. Individuals need to take into consideration all of the surrounding scriptures and the context in which the scripture is being used as they apply it to every day living.

“Christians feed on scripture. Holy scripture nurtures the holy community as food nurtures the human body.”¹⁸ As Peterson explains, “By ‘eating the book’ we become what we read.”¹⁹ Ezekiel was commanded by God to “Eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel” (Ezekiel 3:1). Ezekiel would ingest the Word of God and then relay it to his people. When the Word of God is taken in it becomes part of our being and transformation can take place. When we eat bread it becomes part of our physical being and when we eat the Word of God it becomes part of our spiritual being.

In her book, *Tramp For The Lord*,²⁰ Corrie ten Boom, a beautiful Christian woman from Haarlem Holland, tells the story of how she and her family are caught hiding persecuted Jews in their home During World War II. When she and her sister Betsy are taken to Ravensbruck, a Nazi concentration camp, Corrie risks her life for one object, her Bible. Corrie straps the Bible to her back risking death. Later when she is in the flea infested dormitories of the camp she is able to feed others on the Word. Corrie was miraculously set free from Ravensbruck and became an evangelist, continuing to transform lives with the Word all around the globe.

Reading scripture means that we want to know and hear from God. Scripture is revelatory; it reveals God to us and his plan of salvation. It teaches us to live a holy life

¹⁸ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 18.

¹⁹ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 20.

²⁰ Corrie Ten Boom, *Tramp For The Lord* (Tappan: Jove), 1974.

and follow our role model, Jesus. Peterson says: “Words, spoken and listened to, written and read are intended to do something in us, give health and wholeness.”²¹

Taking a look at Psalm 119 we see that it is the longest psalm and chapter in the Bible. It is said that it is the prayer of a person who delights in and lives by the Torah or sacred law. It bears witness to the importance of the written Word. Almost every verse has a reference to the Law. Schumacher states that “Psalm 119 is a reflection in praise of the Law. The Psalmist delights in the Law because it is the Word of God and obedience to it puts him in close communion with God.”²² Communion with God is our ultimate goal.

In Psalm 119 we receive much wisdom and guidance. The Word keeps us from sinning. How can a young man keep his way pure, by living according to your Word. “I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, Lord; teach me your decrees” (vv. 9-12). The Word strengthens our soul. “My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word” (v. 28). The Word brings comfort. “I remember your ancient laws, O Lord, and find comfort in them” (v.52). The Word is our hope and our salvation. “My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word” (v. 81). The Word bears light to our path and to our soul. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (v. 105). The Word brings peace and stability. “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws. Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble” (vv. 164-165).

²¹ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 21.

²² Schumacher, *Presence through the Word*, 60.

The written Word confronts us. Hebrews 4:12 tells us: “For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edge sword, it penetrates even to dividing souls and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart”. When the Word is taken into the heart, light is shed in the darkness and all is seen for what it really is. In our journey through the written Word if we will open our minds and hearts to Christ the metamorphosis will begin and transformation will continue as long as we seek him.

The Word Incarnate

Christian faith centers on God who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth.

-Bradley P. Holt, *Thirsty for God*

Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner in their book, *Spiritual Direction and The Care Of Souls*,²³ in their chapter on Orthodox Tradition, bring to light a dynamic on the Incarnation and our need for salvation in relationship to our spiritual transformation. “One of the most striking differences between Orthodoxy and most of Western Christianity concerns their respective views of salvation. At the risk of over simplification, Protestants generally define salvation in legal, juridical or forensic terms. Christ death pays the just penalty for humankind’s sin. We receive salvation (forgiveness of sins) by virtue of our faith in his meritorious sacrifice on our behalf. While not denying the sacrificial aspect of salvation, Orthodoxy sees salvation as transformation,

²³ Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner, *Spiritual Direction And The Care of Souls*, (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2004).

the fulfillment of the image of God in humankind. The word used by the fathers of the church to denote this process was *theosis*, or deification.”²⁴

“The Scriptures affirm that in the beginning humankind was made in the image and likeness of God” (Genesis 1:26-27). With the fall of Adam and Eve, the original communion between God and humankind was broken. For Orthodox, the Fall resulted not merely in a legal penalty of death for breaking a law or rule but in true spiritual death, because human beings’ union with the Source of Life was broken. The *nous* or “heart” of human beings was darkened. *Nous* means more than simply ‘mind.’ It is the central organizing faculty of the human personality, beyond both the discursive reason and the affective (emotional) nature. The central core of the human being was separated from its original union with God, thus made unable to fulfill the purpose for which it was created.”²⁵

“If humankind is to be what God intended in the creation, there must be a restoration of communion with God and the transformation of fallen humanity again into fullness of the image and likeness of God. The incarnation of the Word of God was the supreme act of restoration of the image of God in humankind.”²⁶ This is truly where the story begins. It will be seen as the greatest need of man and greatest love of God as God reaches down to man through the Incarnation of the Word.

Revelation

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (John 1:1-2). John wastes no time in

²⁴ Moon and Benner, *Spiritual Direction And The Care of Souls*, 38.

²⁵ Moon and Benner, *Spiritual Direction And The Care of Souls*, 38-39.

²⁶ Moon and Benner, *Spiritual Direction And The Care of Souls*, 39.

identifying Christ's Divinity. He is "Immanuel," God with us. (Matthew 1:23). God has come in the form of Jesus Christ. He has come to redeem his people. John 1:1 is often seen as the central text in revealing that Jesus is God. In the book of John the word "*logos*" (Word) is not retained beyond the prologue but the whole book of John expresses this claim.

Jesus is the Word, the living, spoken, and preexistent Word. He is the revealer of the unseen God. John makes it very plain that he was from the beginning and that he is God. Jesus may have been born in Bethlehem in the physical sense but he has always been.

Jesus Divinity is played out all through the gospels, through his words and actions. He is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He is the healer, the miracle worker; the one who commands the wind and the waves and casts out demons. He is the bread of life. He is the spotless Lamb that takes away the sins of the world. In the Gospel of John, following his resurrection, Jesus revealed himself to a doubting disciple, Thomas, who exclaimed, "My Lord and my God" (20:28). In John 10:30 we see Jesus' statement; "I and the Father are one". The Logos, Word, is God active in creation, revelation, and redemption. This can be evidenced in Hebrews 1:1-3:

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

The Apostle Paul writes in Colossians 1:15-20:

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created

through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

First of all “the Son is the image of the invisible God” (v. 15). He is the one in whom “all things hold together” (v. 17). In verse 19 Paul brings this line of argument to a conclusion, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him”.

Saint Athanasius, a great leader in the Church during the fourth century, has a great deal to offer theologically on the Incarnation.²⁷ First and foremost he believed that the “Word of the Father is Himself divine, that all things that are owe their being to His will and power, and that it is through Him that the Father gives order to creation, by Him that all things are moved, and through Him that they receive their being.”²⁸ He also believed and encourages that we must consider “the Word became man and his divine appearing in our midst”.²⁹ He presents the answer to a very pertinent question, why did God come in human form:

You must understand why it is that the Word of the Father, so great and so high, has been made manifest in bodily form. He has not assumed a body as proper to His own nature, far from it, for as the Word He is without body. He has been manifested in a human body for this reason only, out of the love and goodness of His Father, for the salvation of us men.³⁰

Saint Athanasius statement directs us to John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”. It was love that sent Jesus down to earth and love that held him to the cross.

²⁷ Saint Athanasius was a great Christian Theologian and the 20th Bishop of Alexandria Egypt. He was said to be one of the Great Doctors of the Church. He stood firm in his faith in the battle against Arianism.

²⁸ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 25.

²⁹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 25.

³⁰ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 26.

God is love and his love through Jesus is a foundational piece to the transformation of human souls.

What are the implications of the humanity of Christ? First of all, if Jesus is God come in the flesh, his atoning death is sufficient for us. He was one of us and so could offer himself as a sacrifice on our behalf. Second, Jesus can truly sympathize with us and intercede for us because he understands our human condition. He manifests the true nature of humanity and he demonstrates God's love for us. God is not distant; he lived among us and continues to act within the realm of humanity today through his Holy Spirit.

There is an old saying dating back to the sixteen hundreds, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." The word proof actually means to test something out and see what the results are. The proof that Jesus is God not only has a scriptural foundation as seen in the churches struggle to define the Trinity, but it also can be tested out and experienced personally. Individuals can experience the Word for themselves and experience change, often profound change. The lives that encounter the Word Incarnate also bear witness. During the project studies on individual and group *lectio divina*, as will be seen in Chapter four of this work, some of the participants that encountered the Word through *lectio divina*, encountered spiritual awakening and change. Jesus, the Word Incarnate, is the agent of creation and therefore he is able to re-create, forgive our sins, save, and heal.

Many times people are not able to experience Jesus in their daily walk. They may know him intellectually, but not know him in their heart. They may not recognize the fact that he "is" at work in their lives. John 14:1-11 reveals Jesus comforting his

disciples. He has just told them about his betrayal. He is telling them that he is going to prepare a place for them so that they can be with him:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.' Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

Unfortunately we can be near Jesus and among his people and not recognize him.

Jesus calls us to believe and to have faith. Romans 10:17 tells us that "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ". The Word is paramount in our connection with Jesus and our heavenly Father. M. Basil Pennington in his book, *Lectio Divina: Renewing The Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures*,³¹ suggests that we need to admit our need of a divine connection. It takes humility to admit the state that we are in and our true need for God in our lives. When we make the divine connection with the Word we can truly be "transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Romans 12:2).

The Word can and will renew us. Erickson makes a statement that rings true.

"The Word of God is the means not only to the beginning of the Christian life, but also

³¹ M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York, New York: Crossroads).

growth in it.”³² Our Christianity is not meant to be stagnant. It is not meant to be a one time occurrence. It is meant to be a living breathing thing. We must continue to be “in” the Word and continue to be “in relationship” with the Word. The Word will shape us and form us like the potter and the clay.

Nature and Function of the Word

The nature and function of the Word has many aspects. It can be seen as fire or a hammer that is capable of breaking the hardest heart. This is evidenced in Jeremiah 23:29, “Is not my word like fire,” declares the Lord, ‘and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?’” Our hearts can be permanently changed through the Word. God will meet us where we are and continue to chip away at our hard hearts. In Ezekiel 36:26 God promises to give us a new heart and a new spirit, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh”.

The Word is like a mirror that reflects our true condition as seen in James 1:23-25, “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do”. The Word of God gives us a picture of who we are and where we stand with God. It gives us the tools to change and it encourages us toward that end. We will be blessed if we follow its instruction. The Word calls for action on our part. We can not sit idly by and expect growth and change to happen. It is like the

³² Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1012.

definition of insanity from Alcoholics Anonymous: doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. We must engage the Word and then take action. We must practice intentionality in our journey to transformation.

The Word is like a seed that springs up into life as seen in I Peter 1:23, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God”. It is also referred to as the Word in the Parable of the Sower. The seed is the Word and we witness that it sometimes does not take root or multiply itself. When the soil of the heart is prepared it will flourish and produce one hundred fold. We must enter the Word and allow God to prepare the soil of our hearts.

The Word is seen as food: milk for babies and strong meat for the mature as evidenced in Hebrews 5:12-14, “In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil”. Those who constantly go to the Word train themselves. Maturity comes through the application of God’s Word in our lives and consistently allowing the Word to enter our mind, heart and soul, so that it may be transformed.

The Word is compared to gold and silver in Psalm 119:72, “The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold”. The Psalmist makes it very plain the value of the Word is above any earthly thing that we could possess. And finally, but not totally, the Word is light and illuminates the souls of mankind. The Word is the Light in Genesis 1:3, in John1, in Psalm 119:105 and

throughout the Scriptures. The Word lights our path and he brings the light of truth to our minds and hearts. In John 8:12 Jesus proclaims that his is “the light of the world”. We are called to walk in that light and the light will dispel the darkness.

Moving forward, we are going to be examining the vehicle that the writer used to deliver the Word to the minds and hearts of the participants in the studies that are seen in Chapter four. It is through this ancient form of prayer that individuals and groups can read, reflect, pray and commune with God.

Lectio Divina

A very Ancient art, practiced at one time by all Christians, is the technique known as *lectio divina* - a slow, contemplative praying of the Scriptures which enables the Bible, the Word of God, to become a means of union with God.

-Fr. Luke Dysinger, *Accepting the Embrace of God*

Lectio divina is the Latin word for *divine reading*, spiritual reading, or holy reading. It is a practice of prayer and scriptural reading that promotes communion with God and enhances a person’s knowledge of the Word of God. It is a way of praying the scripture that draws one to study, reflect, listen and pray God’s Word.

According to history some say that Origin laid the groundwork for *lectio divina* as he read and prayed to find deeper meaning in the text. Origin is considered a mystic and the father of the spiritual sense of scripture. Born in Alexandria Egypt in 185 A.D., he was considered the greatest scholar of Christian antiquity and wrote in excess of 2,000 works. By the 5th century monasticism made *lectio divina* a daily part of their horarium

or The Hours. The Hours was part of the monks daily schedule with times of prayer and silence interspersed through the day and evening. The Hours are still practiced today. The writer often visits Mount Saint Mary's Abbey in Wrentham, Massachusetts where there is a community of Cistercian Nuns. Saint Mary's Abbey was the first monastery of Cistercian Nuns in the United States. The nuns have taken a vow of silence but they sing The Hours daily. Attending the Hours is like having one foot in heaven.

Other scholars say that the founders of the tradition of *lectio divina* were Pope Gregory I and Saint Benedict. Pope Gregory I (c. 540-604) was also known as Gregory the Great. He was the first of the Popes to come from a monastic background. Saint Benedict of Nursia (c.480 to 547) founded monastic communities and is known for his "Rule" which were precepts written for his monks to live by. First of all the precepts were Christ centered and taught how to live the Christian life. Second they were administrative, and taught how to run a monastery. Benedict extolled the value of divine reading in his Rule and made it a daily part of the ritual and life of the Benedictine Monks. Daily life in a Benedictine monastery was very structured and consisted of three elements: liturgical prayer, physical labor and *lectio divina*. The scriptures were often read aloud to the monks due to the fact that many were illiterate and Bibles and books were in short supply. David Foster states in his book *Reading With God*.³³

Among the monks and nuns of the early Church a great deal of time was devoted each day to the scriptures and to prayer, and not only during the frequent times of common prayer that punctuated each day and consecrated it to God. By the Middle Ages, at a time when people had a high regard for putting things into ordered patterns and systems, *lectio divina* was 'sorted' into a tidy scheme as well. The most famous of these was the *Ladder of Monks* by Guigo II, Prior of the Grande Chartreuse, around 1180. As with all patterns, there is a danger of

³³ David Foster, *Reading With God: Lectio Divina* (New York, New York: Continuum), 2005.

over schematization and reducing human activity to techniques and performance. But a scheme is a good pedagogic tool and we can learn from it.³⁴

Saint Benedict, in his Rule, stipulated specific times and manners for *lectio divina*, but the progression from Bible reading, to meditation, to prayer, to loving regard toward God, was first formally described by Guigo II. Around 1150 A.D. Guigo wrote his famous *Scala Claustralium*, "The Monks Ladder". The imagery in his writing resembles Jacob's ladder reaching from earth to heaven seen in Genesis 28. Guigo named the four steps of this "ladder" of prayer with the Latin terms *Lectio*, *Meditatio*, *Oratio*, and *Contemplatio*.

In Guigo's four stages, one first reads, which leads to meditate on the importance of the text; that process in turn leads the person to respond in prayer as the third stage. The fourth stage is when the prayer points to the gift of quiet stillness in the presence of God that is called contemplation. Guigo's understanding of the four movements is a progression where the ultimate results are achieving contemplative union with God.

In September of 2005 Pope Benedict XVI stated that he wanted to recall and recommend the Ancient Art of *lectio divina*. He felt that the practice of *lectio divina* would bring a spiritual renewal to the church. This renewal has progressively begun to take root and is like the farmers garden that is sprouting upward with roots going deep into the soil of human hearts. As the body of Christ we need to continue to water and cultivate the soil of *lectio divina* so that it will continue to grow and bring the blessing of the Word of God to the human heart.

³⁴ Foster, *Reading With God*, 3.

Below is Figure 2 which gives a visual image of the four stages of *lectio divina*. An in-depth description of the stages of *lectio divina* will be seen in chapters three and four.

Figure 2. The Four Stages of Lectio Divina



Source: Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/> [accessed May 17, 2020].

Richard Foster gives us a glimpse of the stages of *lectio divina* in his introduction to *Reading With God*:

The traditional pattern to *Lectio divina* has four stages: *Lectio-meditatio-oratio-contemplatio*. The pattern implied a process by which the person took the words of scripture from his ears or eyes into his mind (reading or *lectio*), repeated them to himself and chewed them over (*meditatio*), and as they began to be digested, he responded to them in prayer (*oratio*), which initiated a movement of prayer beyond the words to God himself who has spoken with these words, a freer spontaneous moment of adoration (*contemplatio*).³⁵

Foster puts feet to *lectio* by adding: “doing” and “living” the Word. Theologically, *lectio divina* has a practical application. Through the Incarnate Word we seek union with God and because the Word is alive it affects us in every way; spiritually, physically, mentally,

³⁵ Foster, *Reading With God: Lectio Divina*, 3.

and emotionally. As the individual communes with God through the Word, internal transformation begins to take wing and is transposed to the outside where it takes action in the body of Christ and in the community. The Word, via the vehicle of *lectio divina*, becomes the springboard for metamorphosis to take place.

Jesus is our example. He loved the scriptures, read them and taught them. He used scripture to preach, teach, and to expel the devil when in the desert. In Matthew 22:37 he is tested by the Pharisees and asked by them to reveal which of the commandments in the Law is the greatest. Jesus responds by quoting the passage from Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

The greatest commandment is to love the Lord, and then we are instructed to bind the Word on our hearts, teach them to our children, and tie them to our foreheads and hands. That is a picture that tells us that the Word is to be near us at all times. Basil Pennington, in his book *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* says, "God lives in his Word. The word is a Divine Presence."³⁶ According to Pennington, people can have an inexhaustible presence through the practice of *lectio divina*. Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection was of the same mind. He was in constant contact with Christ. He would talk to God in the kitchen while cleaning his pots and pans as well as in the chapel services. Communication with God was the central focus of his

³⁶ Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures*, 4.

existence. The dialogue that we have with Christ through *lectio divina* is prayer, spoken and unspoken.

Prayer and Lectio Divina

Is prayer your steering wheel, or your spare tire?

-Corrie ten Boom, *Tramp for the Lord*

This quote from Corrie ten Boom says so much in nine words. Is prayer directing us and leading us or do we just turn to it when we are in need? That is a question that has stumped the finest of theologians and pastors. Why, when prayer is so powerful and such a necessary part of our walk with Christ, do we often make it the last thing that we do? Many times it is our busy lifestyles and our Martha mentality: working versus sitting at the feet of Jesus, that gets in our way and blocks our communication. Quite honestly, we just do not make it our top priority.

Theologically, prayer itself is part of the process of *lectio divina*. It is daily communication with Christ that takes us on an internal journey. Thelma Hall in her book *Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*,³⁷ talks about the love relationship that is formed between God and the person that is praying. She says that it is like two people falling in love and discovering each other. Hall likens *lectio* and prayer to the scripture in the Gospel of Luke where we are instructed to ask, seek and knock.

“St John of the Cross’s paraphrase of a verse from St. Luke’s Gospel 11:9 provides us with an outline of the four steps of Lectio”:³⁸

³⁷ Thelma Hall, *Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (New Jersey: Paulist Press), 1988.

³⁸ Hall, *Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*, 28.

- Seek in Reading,
- and you will find in meditation
- knock in prayer
- it will be opened to you in contemplation.

Hall states that “Lectio Divina is not an objective technique to be learned and followed as a system which will ‘produce’ deep prayer. On the contrary, it is an organic process, which takes place over a period of time, both in the microcosm of a single prayer period, and in the macrocosm of a lifetime engagement with God in the lived prayer of faithful love.”³⁹ Prayer is like a love relationship, over a period of time it just gets better.

Quite often in this society people see prayer as a verbal offering or like a list they write to Santa Claus. The list gets longer as their needs continue to grow. Prayer during *lectio divina* is not the loud verbal offering or the Santa list; it is often the quiet opening of our hearts to God. Tony Jones in his book *Divine Intervention: encountering God through the Ancient Practice of Lectio Divina*, shares this story: “There’s a great story about Mother Teresa. She was once asked, ‘What do you say when you pray to Jesus?’ ‘I don’t say anything,’ she replied, ‘I listen.’ Well, what does Jesus say to you?’ responded the questioner. She paused. ‘Nothing. He listens, too.’”

The Desert Fathers spent years in quiet and in prayer. Two of the stumbling blocks of this generation are noise and busyness. We need to be able to stop, look, and listen along the path of our prayer journey. The practice of *lectio divina*, just by the way it is designed, can help people come to a place of quiet. This will aid them in achieving the focus that is needed and direct them into a deeper place of prayer.

It will be evidenced in Chapter four that two of the participants in the individual *lectio* study, Gloria and Rose, had deep responses when they were able to come aside and

³⁹ Hall, *Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*, 28.

quiet their minds and hearts during *lectio*. Their prayer lives changed and continue to be changed. Thelma Hall said it best in the title of her book: it is, *Too Deep for Words*.

James Houston in his book *The Transforming Power of Prayer: Deepening Your Friendship With God* states that “we are changed by prayer.”⁴⁰ “Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.”⁴¹ He also goes on to say that the state of prayerlessness in this generation is very characteristic of the world today. He says that “prayerlessness is simply part of a larger picture of modern life of being alone in a crowd.”⁴² How sad is this state of affairs. Houston also states, “It has been wisely observed that no one is safe in the market place of human- affairs if they have not also spent time in the desert of solitude with God.”⁴³

It is time for individuals and churches to get back to basics: to learn how to quiet themselves, spirit, soul and body and to be able to teach this process to others. We must strive to develop a holy rhythm in our lives that will help us progress towards a personal encounter and sacred relationship with our Creator that will enable us to be role models of that lifestyle. To those who have been living on the fringes of society and for the saints in the church, role modeling is very important. If they see how the process is accomplished and the end result, they are more likely to reach out and try it.

In Chapter three of this work, The Literature Review, the authors will take us to a deeper level in plumbing the depths of spiritual transformation. The authors have much to offer from their years of study and personal experience that will help us to gain insight. Being able to enter the mind and heart of another through a book is one of the greatest

⁴⁰ James Houston, *The Transforming Power Of Prayer: Deepening Your Friendship With God* (Colorado Springs, Nav Press 1996), 6.

⁴¹ Houston, *The Transforming Power Of Prayer: Deepening Your Friendship With God*, 7.

⁴² Houston, *The Transforming Power Of Prayer: Deepening Your Friendship With God*, 14.

⁴³ Houston, *The Transforming Power Of Prayer: Deepening Your Friendship With God*, 54.

benefits that we have at our disposal. This generation is blessed to have so many and varied authors that are part of the movement to restore to this generation the practice of the spiritual disciplines. The authors reaffirm our need for the Word as well as give us instruction on how to access the Word: not only for its literary qualities, but for its transforming qualities. They have set before us a veritable banquet table for us to feed upon.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

You will not see anyone who is truly striving after his spiritual advancement who is not given to spiritual reading.

-St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*

When God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees he called him to come and follow him. Abraham did not know where he was going but he trusted God. Later in his life, even though he made many mistakes, God counted Abraham righteous because of his faith and obedience. In our current day, God still calls us to follow him through his Son, Jesus Christ the Word Incarnate. He calls us to be his disciples and to become Christlike. All too often we get the “cart before the horse” in our spiritual journey. Over the centuries history has repeatedly shown that there are certain basics that most always prove out to be true. In this high tech society people think that the basics can be circumvented and that Christians can advance through programs, technology, and busyness. The authors that are about to speak do not necessarily agree that our high speed-high tech lives are taking Christians in the right direction. Many of the programs and meetings in our churches are up-beat and the modern worship music can be exhilarating, but are we missing the point?

Where does deep spiritual transformation come from: a program, music, mega church attendance? Could it be that deep transformation comes from the still small voice and in the quieting of our souls or from opening our hearts and minds to the Word that

brings life? It is evidenced over and over that a deeper connection with God comes when a person or persons can withdraw from the noise and the madding crowds and surrender their hearts and wills to the One who created them. The authors speak for themselves from their education and personal experience. Although they have differences, they agree on many points which will lay a foundation that the people of God can build upon.

Living in the past is not necessarily a good thing, but there are times when it is critically important to take that gaze backward to those that have gone before us and walked the walk, tried, tested and established some of the most basic tenets of our faith and spirituality. As stated in Chapter two, there is much for this generation to gain by gleaning from the writers that have been committed to reviving the reading of the Word and the practice of *lectio divina*.

An open mind, a teachable spirit and determination are needed to take this journey. If hearts are closed the journey will not even begin. We will find ourselves going through the motions and wondering why no inner change is taking place. If we open our hearts and minds to our Christian fathers and our current spiritual leaders, we will have a chance to learn and advance in our desire to be spiritually formed.

The literary sources and their authors that the writer is about to review will reveal road-blocks and blessings, disappointments and advances, trials and victories and a blessed opportunity to go behind the veil and enter into the Throne Room with God. These are literary resources that contribute to growing the saints and moving them toward transformation through Christ, the Word Incarnate, via the ancient art of *lectio divina*.

The authors that we will encounter have been grouped together to promote a flow for reading and understanding; first, our need for God and the possibilities for

transformation; second, understanding Jesus, the Word of God, the one who transforms, and third, the understanding and practice of the Ancient Art of *lectio divina* and how it can lead us to a connection with the Word: and ultimately, union with God.

The first two authors will enlighten us in regard to our need for God and the real condition of the heart of man. Dallas Willard opens our eyes to the reality of our desperate need for God. He leaves nothing to the imagination which is needed in this generation. Without the realization that we are lost without God, we cannot be found. Real character change comes from within and we must open our hearts and allow God to come in and form us.

The second author, Eugene Peterson, enlightens us about the Word in its written and spoken form. It is how we engage the Word and how the Word engages us that is important in our transformation.

Dallas Willard, author of *Renovation of the Heart*, reminds me of a curious scientist. He wants to know what makes things tick. He is not satisfied with the norm and very unsatisfied with the broken sinful lives in the body of Christ. Being a philosopher as well as a spiritual man, he is not only interested in the outer workings of a person's life, but he also is intensely interested in the internal workings of mankind.

Willard is very straight forward in his writing. He aims straight for the center of the bulls-eye when he reveals that the greatest need that we have today is "renovation of the heart."¹ He calls for a total re-do of the inner man and wants to settle for nothing less. Willard feels that we must have a view of our true spiritual condition before things can change. He states, "Yet, without this realization of our utter ruin and without the genuine

¹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, (Colorado Springs: Nav Pres, 2002), 14.

to, no clear path to inner transformation can be found. It is psychologically and spiritually impossible. We will steadfastly remain on the throne of our universe, so far as we are concerned, perhaps trying to 'use a little God' here and there."² So often people will ask why so many individuals are at the end of their rope before they will receive Christ. It is true that not everyone has to get to that place before their hearts are open, but many have stubborn wills and have been taught to pull themselves up by the boot straps. Consequently, they do not even know how to surrender their hearts to God. It is when we get to the end of our rope that we grab on to God's.

Willard's understanding of philosophy and his level of spirituality are beneficial in the ministry of The Salvation Army because he understands the nature of man. He states that "the human spirit is an inescapable, fundamental aspect of every human being; and it takes on whichever character it has from the experiences and the choices that we have lived through or made in our past."³ As people come through the doors of Bridges of Hope it must be taken into account what these individuals and families have been through. What has formed them? Willard believes, and the writer agrees, that history forms us. He states "Our life, and how we find the world now, and in the future, is almost totally a simple result of what we have become in the depths of our being-in our spirit, will, or heart."⁴ The fact is that we need to be "God formed".

Many factors in the world affect individuals and families. Some are by human choice such as bad decisions, greed, war, heartbreak, loneliness and sickness. Some come by natural disaster such as floods, famine, epidemics and earthquakes. What is our

² Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 60.

³ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 13.

⁴ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 13.

response to the everyday experiences that people can have? The question being, are we going to look to the world for answers or look to God?

The writer's favorite scripture is Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well". This is a key that will bring change and order to a life, a family and the church. So often we reverse the natural order of things and wonder why they are not working out or we may take a person that has been traumatized and try to get them into a program at the church that they are not ready for. They may need one to one discipleship and more time for healing before they can move on to higher learning and a deeper spirituality. This reflects back to Booth and Maslow's philosophies in Chapter one. The underlying basic needs of an individual must be met before they can move beyond where they are.

Willard emphasizes that individuals and the church can not settle for mediocre character change. He states that we need "revolution of character."⁵ This character change comes from an ongoing personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the Word. It is this relationship that begins to change the old tapes that play inside of our heads and hearts. According to Willard, and the writer agrees, it can change one's "ideas, beliefs, feelings and habits."⁶ Jesus changes people from the inside out. Systems and programs are not the vehicles that are going to transform the "inner man." Only Jesus can do that. If programs alone could bring healing, everyone would be well by now.

As Willard looks inside the church, he sees the church as a natural result of growth. He states that "Churches are not the kingdom of God, but are primary and inevitable expressions, outposts, and instrumentalities of the presence of the Kingdom

⁵ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 15.

⁶ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 15.

among us. They are ‘societies’ of Jesus springing up everywhere.”⁷ But the church is only going to become what the people inside the church become. Our outer life is gauged on what we become inside.

Today there is a low level of spirituality in Christianity. Dallas Willard and Don Simpson in their book *Revolution of Character: Discovering Christ’s Pattern for Spiritual Transformation*, agree that, “The church is answerable for its condition and so is the rest of humanity.”⁸ They paraphrase I Peter 4:17 in this way: “the apostle Peter wrote, ‘If judgment first begins at the house of God, what shall be the outcome for those who give no heed to the gospel of God? And if it is difficult for the righteous to be saved, what will happen to the godless and rebellious?’”⁹ They remind us that Jeremiah says, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it” (17:9).¹⁰ The root of the problem must be attended to. We can not continue to sugar coat mankind’s condition and begin to see real transformation taking place.

True change brings hope into the lives of those seeking internal change. It is so difficult to feel trapped inside of yourself and know that nothing on the outside can help. The Good News of the Gospel reassures us that through Christ we can become a new creation. Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (17-19). The church has

⁷ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 16.

⁸ Dallas Willard with Don Simpson, *Revolution of Character: Discovering Christ’s Pattern for Spiritual Transformation*, (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2005), 42.

⁹ Willard and Simpson, *Revolution of Character*, 42.

¹⁰ Willard and Simpson, *Revolution of Character*, 43.

been given a powerful message of hope and is the vehicle to give that hope to a lost and dying world. As stated earlier, Bridges of Hope was founded on the promise from Jeremiah 29:11 that with Christ there is hope for change and a future. Proverbs 13:12 tells us, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life”. Hope mixed with faith creates a mustard tree effect in people’s lives. It opens the door to growth and keeps on growing: the potential being unlimited.

Willard teaches that transformation is possible with Christ but there are blocks in our path, such as having an outward form of religion, the concept that being good is enough, the problem of the human will, the lack of belief that change is possible and low living as a Christian. He says that to counter these conditions we must: reach for our goal, be active in our pursuit for Christ, be God directed and full of grace.

Willard does compare the local congregation to a hospital and recognizes that people are in different stages in their journey. The writer could not agree with him more. That is truly the picture of Bridges of Hope. He urges us to follow Ephesians 5:1, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God,” and Philippians 2:15, “so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe”.

Willard, in his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*,¹¹ goes straight to the heart of the matter and straight to the writer’s heart when he discusses practical theology. Our theology must be relevant to the hearts and minds of the people. If it is not relevant and can not be applied in their everyday lives,

¹¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, (New York; New York: Harper Collins) 1988.

there is a good chance that they will not want to bother. Today, people are getting back to basics and many are in survival mode. They need to be able to see how their theology and relationship to the Word will work out each and every day. Willard states, "Practical theology's overall task is, in effect, to develop for practical implementation the methods by which women and men interact with God to fulfill the divine intent for human existence."¹² The responsibility of the church is to proclaim the Gospel, make disciples and develop the disciples into the character of Christ.

Both Willard and Peterson agree that, there are no secret formulas for growing up into the character of Christ. It is a way of constant seeking. It is making ourselves available to Jesus and keeping our hearts and minds open. It is intentionally allowing God to form us like the potter and the clay and allowing him to renew our minds and break the old tapes. Willard says, "We must trade our ideas and images for His."¹³ This is where the reading of the Word is so vitally important. It is through constant communion in the Word that our minds, hearts, and character are changed. And it is through the practice of *lectio divina* that the soil of our heart is watered as we pray and meditate on the living Word. Willard states that we need to immerse the disciples in the presence of the Trinity. Not only change, but Christlikeness will be the natural outcome.

Eugene Peterson's work, *Eat this Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*,¹⁴ is filled with the flavor of language. It is all about the Word, written and spoken, prayed and acted upon. He uses the imagery of a dog-chewing on a bone and likens the chewing to scriptural references to eating the Word. Peterson views the Word

¹² Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 15.

¹³ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 102.

¹⁴ Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*. (Grand Rapids: Michigan Eerdmans, 2006).

as dealing with our total being. He observes the Word in community and demonstrates that in community we are kept on a narrower path. It is dangerous to get in a position where one is isolated and alone. No “Lone Rangers” allowed.

Peterson brings to our attention that the way we read the Bible is important. Many Bibles lay dust covered on coffee tables and in book shelves in people’s homes. Some people may even have four or five Bibles lying around, but unfortunately they are not being read. The question is, why? Peterson says that he feels that although many people may believe that “their Bible is the Word of God, what is neglected is reading the Scriptures formatively, reading in order to live.”¹⁵ Peterson believes that we are not only to read the Scriptures but we are to “live them.”¹⁶

There definitely is a lack of seriousness surrounding the reading of the Scriptures today, but it is the writers experience that many of the people that enter through the doors of The Salvation Army believe that they can not understand the Bible and have been taught that only a “Religious” can interpret the Word. People may not know where to start to read and open to a book such as Deuteronomy or the book of Revelation and feel totally overwhelmed. You can attend a church for years and still not understand the basics about your Bible and how to best go about reading it unless you are instructed. Also, people may be reading the Bible as literature and not engaging the Holy Spirit while reading the text. The Holy Spirit is the one who makes the Word come alive in our hearts and minds. Peterson states that “the Reformers insisted on what they called the ‘perspicuity’ of Scripture, that the Bible is substantially intelligible to the common person and requires neither pope nor professor to interpret it. It is essentially open to our

¹⁵ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, xi.

¹⁶ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, xii.

understanding without recourse to academic specialists or privileged priesthood.” The writer agrees with this statement when the individual is operating in the Holy Spirit. If they are not, the Bible may remain only literature to them.

The writer as well as the authors in this work, agree with Peterson that the “Christian Scriptures” are the primary text to be used for “Christian Spirituality.”¹⁷ He calls for a submission of authoritative self to the authority of the Word. “I want to counter this widespread practice of taking personal experience instead of the Bible as the authority for living. I want to pull the Christian Scriptures back from the margins of the contemporary imagination where they have been so rudely elbowed by their glamorous competitors, and reestablish them at the center as the text for living the Christian life deeply and well. I want to expose this replacement of the authoritative Bible by the authoritative self. I want to place personal experience under the authority of the Bible and not over it.” We have become the “feel good” generation. The problem is that our feelings can go up and down like a seesaw when it is unbalanced. We do not read the Word, simply to take a test, but we read to live. The Word is alive and brings nourishment to “every tissue of our lives.”¹⁸

Peterson states that “God is relational at the core,”¹⁹ and that his personal revelation of himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit draws us into participation, or as stated earlier, the dance. The Scriptures are basically narrative, so when reading or listening to the Scriptures, we can participate in the ongoing story of our heritage. As we participate it becomes part of us and carries over into our everyday lives. It becomes applicable and we assimilate the Word as we would food.

¹⁷ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 15.

¹⁸ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 20.

¹⁹ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 27.

As stated in Chapter two, the Trinity is essential in Christian spiritual formation. Peterson puts forth a theory called “The Replacement Trinity.”²⁰ He explains his theory this way: “The new Holy Trinity. The sovereign self expresses itself in Holy Needs, Holy Wants, and Holy Feelings. The time and intelligence that our ancestors spent on understanding the sovereignty revealed in Father, Son and Holy Spirit are directed by our contemporaries in affirming and validating the sovereignty of our needs, wants, and feelings.”²¹ This system that is presently undermining people spiritually is bigger than life. It is insidious and is creeping into every area of our existence. Peterson believes, and the writer agrees, that we are in danger of losing our identity. God’s sovereignty and our Christian beliefs in the Trinity are being watered down. New, radically changed, statements of faith are being glued into the back of hymnals. Genders are being neutered, and it won’t be long before people don’t know what they believe or who God really is without going straight to the Bible itself.

Peterson, as well as Willard, reminds us that reading the Word can bring discomfort and that is another reason why people collect dust on their Bibles. When they open the pages of their Bibles they are confronted and do not want to deal with whatever it is that the Word is revealing to them. The writer also notes that a very real danger comes when the Word no longer confronts us. When we can open the Bible and not see anything that brings us to self-examination or calls us to a higher and holier way of life, we are in trouble! The Word can be like sandpaper that smooths off the rough edges in our lives but then creates a smooth finish that is beautiful. The Master Carpenter, Jesus, knows what is best for each and every person.

²⁰ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 31.

²¹ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 34.

Peterson provides a segment on reading the text *lectio divina* style. He states that, “*Lectio divina* provides us with a discipline, developed and handed down by our ancestors, for recovering the context, restoring the intricate web of relationships to which the Scriptures give witness but that are so easily lost or obscured in the act of writing.”²² He feels that *lectio divina* is “a way of reading that guards against depersonalizing the text into an affair of questions and answers, definitions and dogmas.”²³ It is a way of reading that allows one to assimilate the text and make it a part of their living, breathing, every day, affairs of life. As Peterson walks you through the stages of *lectio divina* he fluidly moves from pen and ink to reading and “entering the word of the text”²⁴ He feels that “*Lectio divina* is not a methodical technique for reading the Bible: it is a cultivated, developed habit of living the text in Jesus’ name. This is the way, the only way, that the Holy Scriptures become formative in the Christian church and become salt and leaven in the world.”

The Word of God is also a vital piece in this work. It is the *Word* that became flesh and walked among us. It is the Word that laid down his life and broke the power of sin and death over mankind. It is through the Word that man is transformed. There are two authors that stood out among many and presented two different styles of writing for two different reasons: The first is Saint Athanasius who demonstrates a passion of standing for the truth, the second is Sr. Evelyn Schumacher who demonstrates a passion and love for Christ.

Saint Athanasius was a great Christian Theologian and the 20th Bishop of Alexandria Egypt. He was a defender of the doctrine of the Trinity against the religion of

²² Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 91.

²³ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 90.

²⁴ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 99.

Arius. As many would claim, his work is magnificent. This book, *St Athanasius: On the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*,²⁵ has been written in a scholarly manner but has been edited in a form that any individual could read.

Athanasius was Egyptian by birth and Greek by education. His birth took place around 298. His home was in Alexandria and his family was well off. Many in his church were martyred and this had a big influence on his life and faith. "The persecutions of the third century had driven many Alexandrian Christians to take refuge in the Egyptian desert; and some had found their life so congenial to Christian piety that, when the danger was over, they did not return. Thus was born monasticism which was destined, when persecutions were past, to take their place as the leaven of the Church's life."²⁶

Athanasius battled against Arianism, which taught regarding the Word of God, "that 'once he was not.'" Athanasius makes it very plain that Jesus coming to us was divine and that He is the Word, one in the same with God. Jesus *is* God and that he assumed a body for our salvation. This work takes you step by step into the thought process and conclusions that Athanasius comes to. He is firm in his belief and lays it out in a methodical manner.

Athanasius also speaks out against the Gnostics "who have invented for themselves an Artificer of all things other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. These simply shut their eyes to the obvious meaning of Scripture. He sees God as infinite, not finite. God brought the world into being by the Word. He quotes Paul in Hebrews 11:3 "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that the

²⁵ Saint Athanasius, *On the Incarnation, The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* (New York: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), 25.

²⁶ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 18.

things which we see now did not come into being out of things which had previously appeared".²⁷ He believed that God gave a special grace to man in that he shared his own image with his creation.

Athanasius demonstrates that "It was our sorry case that caused the Word to come down, our transgression"²⁸ that called out his love for us, so that he made haste to help us and to appear among us." We are the cause of Jesus taking human form. He goes on to say that "Instead of remaining in the state in which God had created them, they were in process of becoming corrupted entirely and death had them completely under its domain."²⁹ This statement brings the writer back to Dallas Willard and his belief that man is completely corrupted and needs a radical transformation. It truly is a Divine Dilemma.

To solve this Divine Dilemma only Jesus could stand in our place. Mere repentance could not fix it. Jesus took on a human body like our own. He took it from a spotless virgin without human father. He surrendered his body to death for all out of sheer love for us. "The Word perceived that corruption could not be got rid of otherwise than through death."³⁰ "He fulfilled in death all that was required."³¹ "For the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Saviour of all, the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death."³²

Athanasius felt it was important for the creature to know its maker and that it was God's intention for man to know him. We are made in God's image. Although man

²⁷ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 28.

²⁸ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 28.

²⁹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 29.

³⁰ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 34.

³¹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 35.

³² Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 35.

became corrupt and idol worshippers, “He provided the Works of Creation also as a means by which the Maker might be known.” This can be beautifully seen in Romans 1. We can see God in nature and we have not excuse not to know he exists.

Athanasius felt that men had turned from the contemplation of God to looking at the world. He believed that through the acts of Jesus men might believe. He states that “His bodily acts still declare him to be not man only, but the Power and Word of God.”³³ He believed that if you desire to see God who is invisible then look at Christ. If you do not understand him, look at his works, what he has done.

In the appendix of the book Athanasius has written a letter to a gentleman named Macellinus. The letter is written in order to encourage him in his day of trial and provide him with a statement of faith. This letter was also written in hopes that Macellinus would go on to prove out the statement of faith by studying the Scriptures, for the Scriptures are written and inspired by God. Athanasius then begins to quote an old man who describes each book of the Bible as a garden growing its own kind of fruit. He says that the Psalter gives a picture of the spiritual life and how it produces fruit. There is much fruit to be born in the Word and it is worth fighting for the truth. Athanasius is a sterling example of a man so convicted in his heart for the truth about the Incarnate Word that he gave himself totally to the task of knowing the truth and defending it. This book is a must for those studying the Incarnation.

Sr. Evelyn Ann Schumacher, O.S.F., the author of, *Presence Through the Word*,³⁴ has authored a book that is written from the heart. Schumacker writes from the viewpoint of love in contrast to Athanasius writing from a point of convincing.

³³ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 47.

³⁴ Schumacher, *Presence Through the Word*, 13.

Schumacher delves into John 1 and reveals Jesus as the Word. She leaves no room for doubt that only Jesus could accomplish mankind's reconciliation with God. She is very much in line with Dallas Willard because she also talks about the heart and its need for transformation. She brings forth the biblical meaning of heart. "Scripturally, the heart is the symbol of that inner 'fountain' out of which flow all our affections, passions, desires and thoughts. It is that mysterious invisible 'place' within us where our 'spirit' meets God's Holy Spirit in the mutual self-surrender of love. It is in this meeting that we are touched and transformed in the depths of our being."³⁵ She further explains that the Eastern Fathers of the Church refer to this type of prayer as the "prayer of the heart."³⁶

In the Old Testament the heart is seen as the seat of intelligence and the seat of emotional activity. Man can reckon in his heart which means to plan and man can have a heart of stone. In the New Testament it is "seen mainly as the place where the divine activities of God transform the Christian."³⁷ God sends his Holy Spirit into the heart of a Christian and the "Risen Christ dwells in our hearts."³⁸ Both Old and New Testaments reveal that our outward behavior comes from the heart and our behavior influences our thoughts and vice versa. Schumacher feels that the yearnings of the heart are the "source of our every thought word and deed."³⁹ It is within the heart that, as humans, we have the capacity to be deceived and deceive ourselves. We often do not know our own hearts because there is so much that lies beneath the surface. Schumacher believes that times of reflection and silence are desperately needed so that we can come to know ourselves more than at a superficial level.

³⁵ Schumacher, *Presence Through the Word*, 22.

³⁶ Schumacher, *Presence Through the Word*, 22.

³⁷ Schumacher, *Presence Through the Word*, 24.

³⁸ Schumacher, *Presence Through the Word*, 24.

³⁹ Schumacher, *Presence Through the Word*, 24.

Schumacher directs the reader to have a listening heart. We can have communion with God, he will speak to us, he is everywhere around us. She uses Psalm 139:7-10 to show God's activity in the universe. The scripture states, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast". This scripture is so powerful and useful for individuals that have had a lot of pain in their lives or feel separated from God. It is a wonderful scripture for *lectio divina* and the writer has used it many times with hurting men and women that are trying to identify with their Heavenly Father. It is a Psalm that is very personal.

Schumacher speaks about contemplative prayer that takes place in the heart. She says, "To be contemplative, prayer must lead to new and deeper insights about oneself, ones relationship to God and to other people."⁴⁰ Contemplative prayer can bring the individual into self discovery and can bring you into new depths in faith living and into a "new realm of genuine spiritual values."⁴¹ When we meditate on the Word we come to realize more and more our need for God.

To find Schumacher's book you may need to go online or visit a Catholic bookstore.

In this next section we will be taking a look at *lectio divina*. *Lectio divina* is a major factor in the project design used to deliver the Word of God to the participants of the studies that are seen in chapter four of this work. Five authors have stood out among the others. They all have a different flavor but have been informative, inspiring, and have

⁴⁰ Schumacher, *Presence Through the Word*, 66.

⁴¹ Schumacher, *Presence Through the Word*, 67.

helped to lead the way out of the dungeon of ignorance. Through their personal experiences and their ability to glean from the experiences of the forerunners of this practice, these authors pave the way for a clear picture of what *lectio divina* has been and can be for us today.

First we will see Michael Casey who gives us a wonderful look at the Western tradition and gives us some down to earth information regarding *lectio divina*. The second author is David Foster who delights in helping lay people come to the table of *lectio* and feast from it. The third author is Thelma Hall who invites you into a more mystical journey. The rhythm of her writing invites you to embark on a journey to a deeper level in your intimacy with the Word. The fourth author, M. Basil Pennington, transports you from the ancients to the modern day practice of *lectio* in cyberspace. He is modern and his up-to date approach makes *lectio* more approachable for many. The fifth and final authors are Christine Valters Paintner and Lucy Wynkoop who are very contemporary authors. Their book is great for beginners and gives practical step by step pointers for the novice. Let us begin with our first author, Michael Casey.

Michael Casey is a Cistercian monk and Prior of Tarrawarra Abbey in Victoria Australia. It is obvious that his book, *Sacred Reading*⁴² is steeped in the Western tradition. Due to his rich heritage in his Roman Catholic faith Casey is able to fluently share his knowledge and experience of his tradition. This book offers a valuable entry point in examining the Western tradition that has so deeply influenced the practice of *lectio divina*. He uncovers the contemplative approach to the sacred writings, especially the Bible and spiritual classics. He demonstrates how *lectio divina* leads to a deeper relationship with God and a more spiritual way of life.

⁴² Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, (Liguori: Liguori/Triumph, 1996).

Casey begins with the basics, the history of *lectio divina*, and moves fluently through the interwoven lives of the monastics. Casey believes that the church of antiquity has strong roots and much to offer the church today. These deep roots serve to remind us that centuries have passed and so have trends and mind-sets. When we are called to renewal there is a depth of spirit and experience in these roots that we can call on and re-discover.

In many religious orders the question was asked, “What do we have to offer the people of God? Casey points out that the monastic communities gave us the view of a distinctive lifestyle that was modeled for us. He states, “Monastic life was a serious response to the gospel, not so much a denial of the world as wanting to live according to the teachings of Christ.”⁴³ This may be a far cry from what people see from the outside looking in. Many believe that the monks were running away from life. Casey helps us to take another view of the mountain.

Casey also points us in the direction of connecting the past with the present. He calls us to renewal and to look at the “elements of universal human experience that are overlooked in our culture that can be rediscovered by paying attention to the insights of another time and situation.”⁴⁴ Casey indulges in the history of *lectio divina*, not so that one will replicate it, but learn from the experience of the Church Fathers and be able to move forward with their own experience. There is a rich heritage to behold. He says, “I am not advocating a return to the ways of antiquity. I am simply asserting that there are

⁴³ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 35.

⁴⁴ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, viii.

elements of universal human experience that are overlooked in our culture that can be rediscovered by paying attention to the insights of another time and situation.”⁴⁵

Casey shares some very practical information on the preparation, practice, and application of *lectio divina*. He urges participants to be consistent in their reading of scripture in order to maintain the integrity of the text. He directs the reader to try to avoid misinterpretation with random reading: instead, practice *lectio continua*, which is the constant reading of the text, not leaving anything out. It is dangerous to pick out small portions of scripture or isolated verses and just focus on them. It is too easy to take what is being said out of context. He also advises not to practice cutting, which is randomly opening the scriptures and reading. It is best to pick a chapter or portion of scripture and dedicate yourself to fully reading through to the end. He encourages each individual to be realistic and stick with it for the long haul. He says, “Don’t be afraid of mistakes.”⁴⁶ Find a quiet undisturbed place. Make sure that your environment is conducive to reading. Have good ventilation and maintain good posture. Start and end with prayer and read slowly. If you care to journal, jot down the inspirations that you receive while reading.

Casey also agrees with Peterson, Willard, and the other authors in this segment, that *lectio divina* takes us beyond our comfort zone. He says that when we read, we grow and that “God is speaking to us in a new language.”⁴⁷

When it comes to the Word, Casey uses the picture of sowing seed which will produce fruit in proportion to the receptivity of the soil. There needs to be mental preparation before one begins *lectio*. Casey openly reveals that the receptivity of the

⁴⁵ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, viii.

⁴⁶ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 80.

⁴⁷ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 89.

Word within the life and heart of the believer will be affected by how much plowing of the heart has been done. He states that revelation is subtle and does not force itself on the person for acceptance. The Spirit woos us. This places a great deal of emphasis on the subjective disposition of the reader. Casey does remind us that when we read, the Holy Spirit is with us. The Spirit “reminds us of the realities of which Scripture speaks”⁴⁸ and leads us to the fullness of truth. Our reading does not go unaided.

The third item that Casey brings forth is penetration of the mind and heart when reading the Scriptures. We may have to pass around the mountain many times before we are enlightened. As we pass around the mountain we will see a different view. There is always more richness waiting to be gleaned from the Bible. Each individual is on their own time schedule with God. He knows when they are prepared to receive the revelation that they seek.

Another theme that Casey approaches and is seen in many of the works cited is, “Be doers of the Word and not hearers only” (Paraphrase James 1:22). This causes a natural outward flow that comes from the internal change and growth that takes place within each individual. Casey is practical in the aspect that he believes that “Sacred reading speaks to my present situation.”⁴⁹ The Word is current. It was applicable to our Church Fathers and it is applicable to us today. The power to transform a life has not diminished one bit. It can and will change your life and then the lives of those around you.

Casey reflects on the success of *lectio divina*. He feels that *lectio divina* succeeds only if it causes me to drop my defenses and then allows God to touch my heart. From

⁴⁸ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 46.

⁴⁹ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 55.

this flows a life change. Several of the authors such as Willard as seen earlier in this chapter and Paintner and Wynkoop, who will be evidenced further on in this chapter, agree strongly on the relevance and importance of the relationship of the Word with the heart. Christine Paintner and Lucy Wynkoop in their book *Lectio Divina: Contemplative Awakening and Awareness* say; “Lectio divina inspires a continuous conversion of the heart. Conversion is the process of falling more deeply in love with God and the world. It means allowing ourselves to be continually surprised by God. Conversion is about allowing our vision to be changed by a God who is much larger than we can imagine.”⁵⁰

Casey gives good basic instruction for the practice of *lectio divina* which will be evidenced in Chapter four. He ends his teaching on *lectio* by reminding us that we need to be practical in our practice. If things are not going well, be willing to change things around. Be realistic as to your daily situations and take a look at your own personal growth. It could be that you have changed and therefore need to change your approach to *lectio* and the text.

Our second author, David Foster OSB, is a Benedictine Monk at Downside Abbey in England. He has been very interested in bringing to lay leaders and individuals, the blessings of the monastic traditions, especially the art of *lectio divina*. His book, *Reading With God: Lectio Divina*,⁵¹ is a practical handbook for beginners that will introduce them to the practice. Foster, like Casey, brings to us the rich background of the monastics.

There is a wonderful and practical flow to Foster’s book. He not only gives insight and direction but he uses scriptural examples for each lesson. This makes

⁵⁰ Christine Valters Paintner and Lucy Wynkoop, OSB, *Lectio Divina: Contemplative Awakening and Awareness*, (Mahwah: New Jersey, Paulist Press, 2008), 44.

⁵¹ David Foster OSB, *Reading With God: Lectio Divina*, (London: Downside Abbey, 2005).

application of the teaching visual, practical, applicable, and scriptural. With this mode of teaching the reader can evidence what Scripture has to say and gain a clearer picture of what is being taught.

Foster reminds us that people are reading less today. Some people still do not have good reading skills and it is a challenge for them to pick up the Bible. He hits the nail on the head when he talks about communication in this day and age: it is quite often done on cell phones, blackberries, or by e-mail. We no longer get long hand written letters from friends, so how is that effecting our communication through the written *Word*? Pennington has a lot to say on this subject which will be evidenced later in this chapter. He is in agreement with Foster that we are definitely losing something in this generation, but that we can cultivate and use the new methods of communication, even in the art of *lectio divina*. This situation reflects back to the roots of *lectio divina* when the scriptures were mostly read and listened to. As stated previously, books were scarce and not many people were literate. This brings up the importance of liturgy and the reading of Scripture in church services. Many who could not concentrate on the written Word, for what ever the reason, can hear the Word as it is spoken and preached. The spoken *Word* will be planted in the heart of the hearer and they can meditate on it just as a reader would. Reading does not diminish the Word in any way. Foster also believes that listening is a matter of the heart and the heart needs to be ready and desiring to receive. Again, it is the preparation of the soil of the heart that will determine how the seed will be planted and grow. Foster continues to point us to Jesus, the Word Incarnate.

Foster and Casey have a similar flavor to their work. They both are Trinitarian in

their theology, as are the other authors in this chapter, and they stand strong on the fact that an individual that is participating in *lectio* must believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God. As an example, Foster uses the scripture in Nehemiah 8:1-18 where all the people assembled before the Water Gate. Ezra the scribe brought out the Book of the Law of Moses and began to read. All the people listened and they began to weep. The Scripture states that the people gathered around Ezra and “gave attention to the words of the Law” (13b). Foster believes that the scriptures were designed to be listened to. He says that we need to tune in: “If we believe that Jesus is the Word of God, if we want to tune in to God speaking in the scriptures, we need to tune in to Jesus who is that Word.”⁵²

Our third author, Thelma Hall is a member of the Religious of the Cenacle. She is the co-director of the Cenacle Retreat House in Bedford Village, New York where she practices spiritual direction. Hall, in her book *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina: With 500 Scripture Texts for Prayer*,⁵³ invites you on a journey into the world of the mystical point of view. She invites us to look at the relationship between God in the Word and God in us as the Scriptures are read prayerfully. Like Foster, Hall has a large focus on Scripture in her book. The main difference between Foster and Hall is that Hall categorizes the Scriptures in fifty different themes which cover nearly fifty percent of her work. Five hundred scriptures are laid out as an aid for the reader to begin the practice of *lectio divina*. The reader is to select a theme from the list that seems pertinent to them. Then they are to read slowly and prayerfully until there is a response that is personal to the reader. The reader is then to turn to the full text in their Bible and read.

⁵² Foster, *Reading With God*, 18.

⁵³ Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina: With 500 Scripture Texts for Prayer*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

In part one of her work, Hall can definitely draw you in with her poetic sense of writing. It is like taking a long, thirst quenching drink, from a clear mountain stream. She begins the book with a wonderful introduction that bears repeating. "This book is about a simple and time-honored way of prayer which, through a gentle unfolding, opens us to that deep level of communication with the Divine."⁵⁴ "Lectio , is a holistic way of prayer which disposes, opens and 'in-forms' us for the gift of contemplation God waits to give, by leading us to a meeting place with him in our deepest center, his life-giving dwelling place. It begins this movement by introducing us to the power of the word of God in scripture to speak to the most intimate depths of our hearts, to gift and challenge and change us, and to promote genuine spiritual growth and maturity."⁵⁵

Hall uses a powerful analogy to describe *lectio*. She sees *lectio* as a "treasure hidden in a field of obscurity."⁵⁶ She states that besides the monastics that *lectio* has been "under a cloud" so that the ordinary individual became spiritually impoverished. Upon researching, Hall found that even the religious and clergy had lost touch with the art of *lectio divina*. There had been little or no teaching and mentoring on the practice. There was no real knowledge beyond identification of the term itself. Hall did not have any working knowledge of what *lectio* really was but she was on the search for answers. She was lead to unearth this hidden treasure and make it known to the public. Hall was following the directive and promise in Matthew 7:7-8 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened". Hall sought and she found. Now she is sharing her findings with others.

⁵⁴ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 7.

⁵⁵ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 7.

⁵⁶ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 7.

In Chapter four, Hall begins her walk through the stages of *lectio divina*. The *lectio* stage or reading of Scripture is done on the premise that the Scriptures are the “Divine Word” and that reading is to be a “listening” and “hearing” while being “attentive to the speaker.”⁵⁷ This is the time in *lectio* where one pays attention to what the Word is speaking to them. The individual needs to hear and pay attention to the word or words that come to their attention and may be quickened to their heart and mind.

In part two of Chapter four, Hall moves into *Meditatio* or reflecting on the Word. Hall states that “Jesus is the revelation of God in a language I can understand and in a person I can know and live, not only as one who lived and died in history, but one who lives now, in my world, in my heart, and forever. And through the promised gift of the Spirit, which has been given, he truly speaks to me.”⁵⁸ Hall is careful to portray a Divine picture of Jesus Christ. She reminds the reader that they are about to enter a new dimension in prayer and she also reminds the reader of the Holiness of God. We are to enter prayer with awe and wonder. Hall also reminds the reader that in prayer it is the Holy Spirit that will touch our hearts and “bring us to the next level”⁵⁹ which is *Oratio*.

In *Oratio*, Hall shares that our hearts need to be open and that we are to put ourselves in a position where we will allow “God’s action to supersede our own.”⁶⁰ We can allow our intellect to diminish and let God take over. Hall says that one of the effects of *Oratio* is the “increase of holy desire.”⁶¹ It is in the stage of *Oratio* that we must learn to wait patiently. Hall suggests that if patience has not yet been gained that one might

⁵⁷ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 36.

⁵⁸ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 38.

⁵⁹ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 41.

⁶⁰ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 42.

⁶¹ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 43.

return to *lectio* and work their way back through the stages until it becomes more familiar.

Section four moves the reader into the stage of Contemplation. Hall returns to her poetic sense and begins to describe the transition of moving from Oratio to Contemplatio as being “very unlike what one might have expected.”⁶² Giving ourselves over to God and allowing him to take over is not necessarily in our nature. There may be struggles in this stage that bring darkness before the dawn. Hall does engage the reader in understanding the darkness of this stage which is in contrast to others such as Pennington and Paintner and Wynkoop who engage the reader in a more positive stance when difficulties arise. There is a definite mood to Halls writing that is deeply reflective. Being a contemplative person is a determined lifestyle. It is something that we work on every day. It is moving closer to the heart of God and his love and it can take you to a depth that you never thought possible.

In describing the stages of *lectio*, the writer particularly was inspired by a poetic description of *lectio* by “(a French Benedictine monk of an earlier era)”⁶³ that Hall inserted into her work.

We read	(Lectio)
under the eye of God	(Meditatio)
until the heart is touched	(Oratio)
and leaps into flame	(Contemplatio) ⁶⁴

The writer does find that Halls descriptiveness may take a new reader to a level beyond their comprehension upon their first reading. If one is familiar with *lectio divina*, has done some reading, and has actually been practicing, the language may be a bit more

⁶² Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 45.

⁶³ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 44.

⁶⁴ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 44.

familiar and understandable. Hall can go deep in a very short amount of time. It is in her love for *lectio*, her pursuit and practice of the art, and her willingness to bring it to the layman as well as the religious or clergy that shines through the brightest.

Our fourth author, M. Basil Pennington resides in Spencer, Massachusetts at St. Joseph's Monastery. He is a spiritual father, lecturer, retreat master and author. His book *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* has a delightful flavor.

Pennington takes you on a journey from the time of the ancients to modern day cyberspace technology. It is refreshing to have the author address real living for today. Pennington believes that for those that do not have the benefit of living a cloistered life there needs to be a practical way to present *lectio* so that it works within the lifestyle of the working man and woman. He invites you to brainstorm about how *lectio divina* can be presented in a simple but understandable form that can be grasped and put into practice right away. He compares society's reaction to Eastern religions and the New Age movement where simple forms of meditation are taught and people respond and can begin practicing them almost immediately to the heavier applications of meditation that the church may present or unfortunately not present at all. His premise is to be able to offer the practice of *lectio divina* to all who are seeking.

Although he delves into the history of *lectio* in the church, Pennington, as well as Paintner and Wynkoop, start from a different vantage point. They see *lectio* as beginning with the Jewish Rabbi. Pennington states that "It is part of the rich heritage we received from our Jewish sisters and brothers. The accounts of Jesus' life give clear evidence that our Jewish rabbi was a man formed by *lectio*-from his first adventure as a man of twelve

until he hung upon the cross. His first long encounter as Risen Lord with disciples was given over to sharing the fruit of his *lectio*, the *lectio* that had told him that he would die and rise again.”⁶⁵ Paintner and Wynkoop state that “The roots of *lectio* can be found in the Jewish synagogue where the *hage*, or meditation on the Hebrew Scriptures is practiced by rabbis and their disciples; ‘To fix the sacred words in their minds and hearts they murmured them aloud like bees feeding on honey.’ The fathers of the church expanded the concepts of reading and speaking the scriptures as prayer. In homiletics they sought the deeper or spiritual sense of the scriptures.”⁶⁶

Pennington sees *lectio divina* as: “letting our Divine Friend speak to us through his inspired and inspiring Word, and it includes our response to that Word, to his communication to us through that Word. *Lectio* is meeting with a friend, a very special Friend who is God; listening to him, really listening; and responding, in intimate prayer and in the way we take that Word with us and let it shape our lives.”⁶⁷ Using John 15:15 as a foundation, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you,” he continues to build on this picture of this friendship and how a friendship builds through *lectio* by using a similar comparison to that of the Benedictine monk in Hall’s writing.

Lectio as Christian Friendship:

Lectio	Acquaintanceship
Meditatio	Friendly companionship
Oratio	Friendship
Contemplatio	Union ⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, ix.

⁶⁶ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 2.

⁶⁷ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, xi.

⁶⁸ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 77.

Pennington likens this friendship to a man and woman meeting at a gathering. When they first meet they get acquainted. They plan to go out to dinner and get further acquainted and develop a companionship. The companionship grows stronger and stronger until it is a friendship and then when they decide to get married and spend their lives together it is a union. There is a definite sense of building on the relationship with its ups and downs, strengths and strains. But in the end, if pursued, union comes.

Pennington poses a very realistic view of *lectio divina* and the role that it plays in one's life. It fits in to the everyday lifestyle of the individual that would come through the doorway of Bridges of Hope. His style could be shared with a seasoned Christian or a relatively new one. His aim is to make accessible to the multitudes, the wonderful gift of *lectio divina* and the Incarnate Word of God.

Pennington reaches out further and adds two more stages to *lectio*: *Compassio* and *Operatio*. He describes Compassion as "one of the fruits of prayer and contemplation. In this encounter with God our whole being is opened up to experience the brokenness of all creation. We find ourselves unite, not only with God, but with all who live."⁶⁹ In *Operatio* or Action, "Things are already different by our engagement in *lectio*, but we may find ourselves called to engage in other actions that will help others. God invites us to act and then empowers us, directing our steps in the way of peace."⁷⁰ These two stages bring one into a larger scope; what do we do with what we have gained in union with God? It is undeniable that personal transformation comes from that union but doesn't it also stand to reason that out of such a powerful transformation would flow

⁶⁹ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 89.

⁷⁰ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 89.

the love of God that would reach out beyond oneself? God's love is not static. The writer stated previously that when a person is changed it affects those around him.

As Pennington brings his work to a close he moves toward the modern age of cyberspace. Like it or not this is the generation that we are living in today. The writer sees a visionary spirit in this man. He is not stuck in the past, but utilizes the past and puts it into a modern day scenario. He advises that there are many good tools and software on our computers that can be used to effectively practice *lectio* no matter where you are. You can practice individual or group *lectio* on your computer or I Phones. There are even Optelec machines that will read a book into the computer for the sight-impaired.

Pennington concludes his work with a discussion on shared *lectio*. He brings to the reader's attention that by ourselves we have limited listening. It will be evident in the project on group *lectio* in the following chapter that group *lectio* was favored over individual *lectio* just for this reason. Many discoveries were made and shared. Participants gained many views instead of just their own. Even though the participants grew during their individual *lectio* sessions, they most definitely enjoyed and would gladly return to the group sessions. It promoted community and a closeness that they might never have had outside of their experience together.

The fifth and final authors for this section are, Christine Valters Paintner, PhD, who is an adjunct faculty at the School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University and Loyola Institute for Ministry, and Lucy Wynkoop, OSB, who is a Benedictine that is currently director of programs, retreats, and oblates, and spiritual director at the Priory Spirituality Center in Lacey, Washington. Their joint efforts have produced the very

contemporary work, *Lectio Divina: Contemplative Awakening and Awareness*. These women have created a very up-dated work on *lectio divina*. As stated earlier they begin with the roots of *lectio* in the Jewish Synagogue. They move through a brief history of *lectio* and get right to the point. You do not have to wait to engage in *lectio* in their work. Each chapter takes you step by step through the process. One thing that is evident is that they want you to understand what you are doing. Each step is clearly explained and then at the end of each chapter there is a review and a practical application so that you can apply what you have read. Paintner and Wynkoop call the reader to come as they are, there are no pretenses or barriers put up for the reader to overcome. All are welcome to engage in this practice. This book is very user friendly and their work has a wonderful flow to it. Upon entering the text you feel at ease with the process. It is almost as if they are there guiding you along the path.

Even though their work is user friendly they do not leave anything out. They walk you through each step of *lectio divina* and add helpful information at each stage. They give an invitation to read for “formation not for information,”⁷¹ and advise the reader that this type of reading requires a radical posture of deep listening. The subject of reading for formation comes up over and over in all of the authors mentioned in this work.

Paintner and Wynkoop advise the reader that listening is the spiritual foundation of *lectio*. They ask the pertinent question, “What sounds are filling your life?”⁷² Are we listening for Jesus? Isaiah 50:4-5 “the prophet Isaiah describes God as the one who ‘wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The

⁷¹ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 3.

⁷² Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 13.

Sovereign Lord has opened my ears”’. And in Isaiah 55:3 the prophet says, “Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live”. In Psalm 46:10 we see the familiar scripture, “be still, and know that I am God”. Psalm 46:10 is really one of the foundational pieces of *lectio divina*. It is often in the stillness that we are able to hear.

Paintner, Wynkoop and Pennington make it *very* clear that quality is better than quantity in the practice of *lectio*. Reading aloud also can help the senses to grasp the *Word*. Meditatio touches the heart and is revealing. It brings to us things that we need to hear and consider. Let the Word work within you. We must set aside our own agenda for God’s. We must allow change to come. Michael Casey says it this way, “*Lectio divina* is an expression of my search for God. Sacred reading can be considered ‘successful’ only if it causes me to drop my defenses and allow God to touch my heart and change my life.”⁷³

In *Oratio* our hearts have been touched by God and the authors urge the reader to “say yes to God.”⁷⁴ They challenge the reader to look for the “invitation that rises up within you.”⁷⁵ Paintner and Wynkoop state that “Prayer connects us to our deepest self, to the world around us, and to the One who transcends all.”⁷⁶ And in *Contemplatio* the authors make us aware that contemplation awakens us to new vision and shapes our vision of reality. It is that loving gaze at the One who is love. It is taking the time to see reality no matter what it looks like. It is to realize that “life proceeds from an invisible, Transcendent, and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation means cultivating a way

⁷³ Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 62.

⁷⁴ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 44.

⁷⁵ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 45.

⁷⁶ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 45.

of being fully present to God in a loving and unhurried way.⁷⁷

Paintner and Wynkoop take their book to another level at in the last chapters. They cover many forms of communication as did Pennington, but they also include doing *lectio* through the arts such as journaling, art, Icons, film, and motion. They give suggestions for documenting your spiritual experiences on paper and canvas and through body movement. They encourage the reader to see all of life through *lectio*. They are both proponents of holy leisure as well as holy action. These two women have given the community a veritable banquet in their book and it is all there for the taking.

This final section is on the church. The author, James C. Wilhoit, PhD., addresses a question that the writer posed in Chapter one, “Is today’s church equipped to meet the basic spiritual needs of individuals?”⁷⁸ We are reminded that it is within the framework of the church that much of our spiritual activity takes place. It is only fitting to be informed about the pluses and minuses of where the church stands today. The church has a very big influence on individuals and their formation and as leaders we have a responsibility to the flock of God to act and lead in a way that will aid each person in becoming Christlike.

James Wilhoit is the Scripture Press Professor of Christian Formation and ministry at Wheaton College. In his book *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*,⁷⁹ broaches a very important subject. This book is almost written as if it were a response to Dallas Willard in his plea for a renovated heart. Willard actually wrote the foreword in this work and states that this book is of special

⁷⁷ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 56.

⁷⁸ Page 99.

⁷⁹ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

urgency for our times. The focus is the issue of the Contemporary Church in the Western world and worldwide.

The problem is how to lead members through a path of spiritual, moral and personal transformation that brings them into authentic Christlikeness in every aspect of their lives so they can walk in the manner of their calling. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:1 “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received”. Many people in the church today are not living up to their potential.

In the foreword Willard states, “We have for the most of the twentieth century been in a period of time when, in all segments, the Christian churches have been distracted from the central task of teaching their people how to live the spiritual life in a way that brings them progressively to enjoy the character of Christ as their own.”⁸⁰

Churches have been distracted from their central task of teaching their people how to live the spiritual life in a way that brings them progressively to enjoy the character of Christ. In Paul’s language spiritual formation or transformation is the process of putting on Christ.

Wilhoit notes that while some churches have many programs and activities and the “presence of a ‘culture of formation,’”⁸¹ there is a lack of a culture that is transformative. Our lives need to be transformed for the inside out.

There are two other questions posed that are very pertinent. The first is, how do we get back to the powerful form of life that turned the world upside down in the past? And the second, how can we meet the crying unmet need of our world today? The answer comes in a form on spotlighting the church and its responsibility of making

⁸⁰ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 9.

⁸¹ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 13.

spiritual formation leading to Christlikeness their number one goal. This book is really all about intentionality.

Wilhoit says, “The Church was formed to form.”⁸² Our charge from Jesus is to make disciples. The writer’s observation is that Wilhoit sees spiritual formation as a messy, imprecise, and totally achieved by grace. We need to constantly seek God. He uses the agricultural image of John 15, the vine and the branches. Jesus is the true vine and we need to stay spiritually connected to Christ if we want to produce fruit.

One of the hindrances that we come up against is that at the individual level is that our battlefield is the human heart. This statement is connected throughout all of the authors as a theme in which each person must take note and realize that this is a reality and condition of mankind. To counteract this, Wilhoit believes that the Gospel must be central throughout each person’s life. He states, “From personal brokenness and reflection I have come to see that the gospel is not simply the door of faith: it must also be a compass I daily use to orient my life and a salve I apply for the healing of my soul. It is in returning again and again to the cross that we receive the grace that transforms us.”⁸³

Wilhoit challenges his readers to believe that change and growth are possible. The Bible contains many stories of heroes that are truly dysfunctional. The purpose of this is to show how exceptional God is. Change is taking place all around us no matter where we have come from or where we are at present; God can make the difference. It is the church’s duty to reach out to their community and offer avenues to lead them to their goal of transformation. We need to seek solitude, prayer and fasting; we need to realize that

⁸² Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 15.

⁸³ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 29.

transformation does not come easy but takes an earnest effort, and we need to understand and believe that God (the Trinity) is the source. As the church, we can no longer squeeze people into *our* mold and try to make them into our image instead of Christ's. Instead we need to offer them the way of the Word. By this we will hear the testimonies of those that have been visited by God.

In summary, all of the authors in this chapter have spoken to some of the most basic truth that we need to hear and ponder. Willard has demonstrated our lost condition and the need for a heart that is transformed by Christ. He also demonstrates that transformation is possible which gives us hope. Peterson stressed the importance of the written Word. It truly is time to dust off our Bibles and realize that the Word is the text that Christians need to promote life, growth and transformation. Other books can not touch the heart and soul the way the Word of life can. Peterson also reminds us that the Word is confrontational and calls us to self-examination and a higher way of life.

Saint Athanasius reminds us how important it is to stand for truth. It is because of men like Athanasius that the truth of who Christ is, the Word Incarnate, has been protected and passed down to us. He reminds us that if we want to see God, look at Christ. Schumacher directs us to have a listening heart. Our hearts must be open to receive the Word and allow it to work in our lives. It is also within the heart that we can deceive ourselves. We must take an open and honest look below the surface. If we spend time in communion with God he will direct us and speak to our hearts.

Michael Casey encourages the reader to re-connect with the Church Fathers and learn from their experiences. He reminds us that our brothers and sisters that chose the contemplative way of life were not running away from life, but were running to God.

Casey also reminds us to avoid random reading of the Bible. He advocates *lectio continua* which will foster cohesiveness within the Word.

Foster brings up a very valid point in reminding the reader that people have different skill sets. There are people that can not read well, even in this generation. We must remember that we need to know our people so that we can lead them in a fuller way. Thelma Hall reminds us that the Word is a treasure that is hidden in a field. We must often seek it out. Hall had to go through a process of self-discovery and that may be the route that we may have to take. Everything will not be handed to us. Often we must ask, seek and knock if we want to receive.

Pennington addressed the fact that we can not all live in a cloistered environment but with some innovation we can achieve an environment conducive to practicing *lectio divina* and experiencing union with God. Pennington reaches beyond the four basic stages of *lectio divina* and adds two others, *Compassio* and *Operatio*. One of the fruits of *lectio* is compassion for our creation that is broken. The second fruit calls us to reach out to help others. God gives us grace to pass on what we have been entrusted with.

Paintner and Wynkoop take us on a journey into the world of cyberspace. We are reminded that we can access the *Word* through various forms of electronics today. *Lectio divina* and the Word are portable and accessible. We have many choices today to bring the Word into our hearts and lives. We also have many ways to express outwardly such as journaling, painting and other forms of art.

One thing that is very clear, if we are going to grow spiritually we need to get back to basics and take a long hard look into our hearts. Like any child, the child of God must have training and be formed into the likeness of his Father. It is how we go about

being formed that will make a difference in the final outcome. The writer has chosen *lectio divina* as the vehicle to deliver the Incarnate Word to the hearts and minds of the participants in the project studies because it is my belief that it is the Word Incarnate that brings life and change. It is the whole of the Trinity that enters our being and works in the heart of mankind and it is through the practice of *lectio divina* that one learns the techniques that we need to apply to slow us down and help us listen to God. There is no doubt that most people that are not in a cloister or monastery are barraged daily with the insults of the world upon their senses. We need to come aside and let the Master calm the storms in our lives and help us to fix our spiritual sites on him.

In Chapter four, the evidence of whether we are being led by the Word or the world will be evidenced as the writer demonstrates through the project studies, the reality of how many in our congregations truly desire transformation. In a society that is prone to wanting a bed of ease or easy living, the challenges that are brought forth in the necessity of intentionality and hard work in being spiritually transformed, are not always readily accepted. Many graduate from colleges today expecting to start at the top of the ladder instead of at the beginning. The practice of *lectio divina* and the reading of the Word so that transformation takes place, do not work like a magic charm. It poses its challenges and has its victories, but as it will be demonstrated, for those that take the journey and stay on the path, what they gain is beyond anything that they could have imagined.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN AND OUTCOMES

Designing and launching into a project is like walking down a path in the woods where there is a bend in the road and you cannot see what is on the other side of that bend. There is a sense of wonder and excitement, or perhaps apprehension, but your desire to see what lay ahead pushes you forward. In this chapter there are three project studies that have been completed. These studies will reveal information that is pertinent to spiritual transformation in this generation. If clergy and lay leaders are going to move forward in assisting individuals and groups in becoming Christlike, they not only need to take a realistic look at where people are spiritually, but they also need to take an honest look at their own skills and their willingness or unwillingness to learn new techniques so that they can pass them on to others. It is not difficult to get stuck in a rut or run into the spirit of fear when desiring change in your ministry, especially when there are strict denominational boundaries set in place.

Currently, The Salvation Army is not involved in the practice of *lectio divina*, but as previously demonstrated, The Salvation Army is now moving forward with teaching and practicing the spiritual disciplines. This freedom to discover provided an atmosphere conducive to conducting the project studies and the willing hearts of the participants enhanced the opportunity to have outcomes that produced viable information for leaders to use in the future as they decide whether *lectio divina* is an option for their

congregation. It must be noted that the ratios reflected in the following studies are based on a congregation size of 42 members.

Study I: Group Lectio Divina

The first study that was conducted at Bridges of Hope was Group *lectio divina*. The practice of *lectio divina* was introduced into an already existing noontime prayer group. The prayer group met daily during the work week between 12 noon and 1p.m. when time and work load permitted.¹

At the onset, the group consisted of two men and two women. As the days passed by and the participants began to share with others that they were growing spiritually and being blessed, others joined the group. The largest number of participants reached eight, with six women and two men. The numbers in this study are reflective of the increased working population and the inability of many to attend a noontime service. Listed below are the demographics on the participants.

Male #1: is a 65 year old man, married with 6 children. He is a regular attendee at Bridges of Hope and faithful to the noontime prayer. He stated that he joined the study because he desired a closer walk with Christ.

Male # 2: is a 47 year old single male that was an employee at Bridges of Hope during the time of the study. He regularly attended the prayer meeting at noontime and joined the study out of curiosity. It is interesting to note that he had one of the deepest experiences during the study.

¹ The Group Lectio Divina Study began on February 1, 2007 and ended on May 30, 2008. The statistical findings were correlated in September of 2008.

Female #1: is a 42 year old single woman with one child. She was an employee of Bridges of Hope at the time of the study and also attended Sunday services. She was faithful to noontime prayer and was eager to join the Study desiring a closer walk with Christ and wanted to focus on the Word of God.

Female #2: is a 60 year old woman who is married with three children. She is faithful in her attendance at the Corps and an avid reader of the Word.

Female # 3: is a 42 year old single woman whom the writer has named Rose. She began attending the study shortly after it began when she came for noontime prayer and stepped into the atmosphere of the group. She came as often as possible due to her third-shift job and will be evidenced in the Individual *Lectio* Study. Rose attended Bridges of Hope as a member.

Female # 4: is a 58 year old divorced woman with three children and four grandchildren. She is a member of Bridges of Hope and a recent convert to The Salvation Army. Upon attending noontime prayer, Gloria began to have deep experiences with God during the group sessions. The Word came alive to her.

Female # 5: is a 68 year old woman that visits Bridges of Hope off and on. She is divorced and has faced many hardships in her life. She loved noontime prayer and equally became devoted to the group *lectio* sessions.

Female # 6: is a 62 year old woman that is divorced and has two children. She is a member of Bridges of Hope and volunteers at least 20 hours a week in the front office. She has battled with many difficult issues in her life but professes a strong love for Jesus. She is active in the noontime prayer group and slowly entered the time of group *lectio*.

The environment consisted of a small chapel at the back of the main floor of Bridges of Hope. This space is a multipurpose room that often is set up as a chapel for the staff and anyone that wants to go in and pray. The room is bright but there are blinds to control the light. A table was set with various Christian artifacts such as a picture of Jesus at the banquet table inviting a man to come and join him, a cross, a candle, and a wooden, hand carved face of Christ.

The chairs in the room were arranged in a semi-circle so that everyone could face each other. The chairs could be moved to stand in rows if so desired. There was a CD player in the room with soft music playing as people entered. The music provided transition from the busyness of the front office. Music can help to block out noise that would distract participants and is very calming. Eliminate the music if it is distracting.

Prior to the first session of prayer that included a period of *lectio divina*, the writer provided literature and instruction. The article, *Accepting The Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, written by Fr. Luke Dysinger, O.S.B.,² was given to each participant and read during a group meeting. Each person was encouraged to take the article home and re-read it at their leisure and save it for further reference. Each of the four basic steps of *lectio divina* were discussed (Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, and Contemplatio) as well as the dynamics of group *lectio* as they differ from individual *lectio*. Two practice sessions were held along with a time of discussion so that attendee's questions could be addressed. For the reader's convenience, the full article by Father Dysinger may be printed off of the website.

² Father Luke Dysinger, O.S.B., *Accepting The Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, [Http://www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html](http://www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html). [accessed, February 2, 2011].

Lectio: Reading and Listening

In implementing group *lectio*, the person leading the lectio session must first choose a scripture passage that he/she feels is appropriate. Scripture is the primary means by which we understand God speaking to us. The participants were instructed that they were reading for “formation not information.”³ New England, because of the high number of educational institutions, is considered an area steeped in intellectualism. It is easy to read for knowledge, even when it is the Bible, instead of reading to meet the author, God. Each person in the group was encouraged to follow the direction of Psalm 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God”. And second, Psalm 37:7, “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him”. When choosing a scripture the writer advised the participants to choose a portion of scripture that was not too lengthy, especially in the beginning stages of the group sessions.

Body posture is important. The participants were instructed to find a comfortable position for sitting. Some participants sat in chairs but some chose to sit on the floor on a pillow. A few minutes of quiet before proceeding is helpful to quiet the spirit. Five minutes is a suggested quiet time. Breathing in and out slowly and relaxing the body can help rid the individual of daily tensions and help them to settle in.

In group *lectio*, the person selected to read, reads the Scripture slowly and out loud. After a quiet pause, the Scripture is read a second time with the instruction to listen for a word or phrase that speaks to their life. This is where the participants can begin to reflect on what speaks to them. The passage is then read a third time and an opportunity is given to the participants to share what God has spoken to them. This should not be too lengthy so that it will not take away from hearing the Lord.

³ Paintner and Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina*, 3.

At the conclusion of the time of reflection, with permission of the group, someone may journal the findings. During this study a journal was kept for six months. Each scripture that was read and the inspiration of each participant that desired to share was recorded at each session. At the close of the session participants were welcomed to stay in the chapel for personal reflection and prayer if they so desired.

The writer led the *lectio* sessions for the first two weeks and then each participant was given the opportunity to be part of a rotating schedule where they would take a turn choosing the scripture through prayer and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Some were hesitant at first but eventually all eight participants led the group.

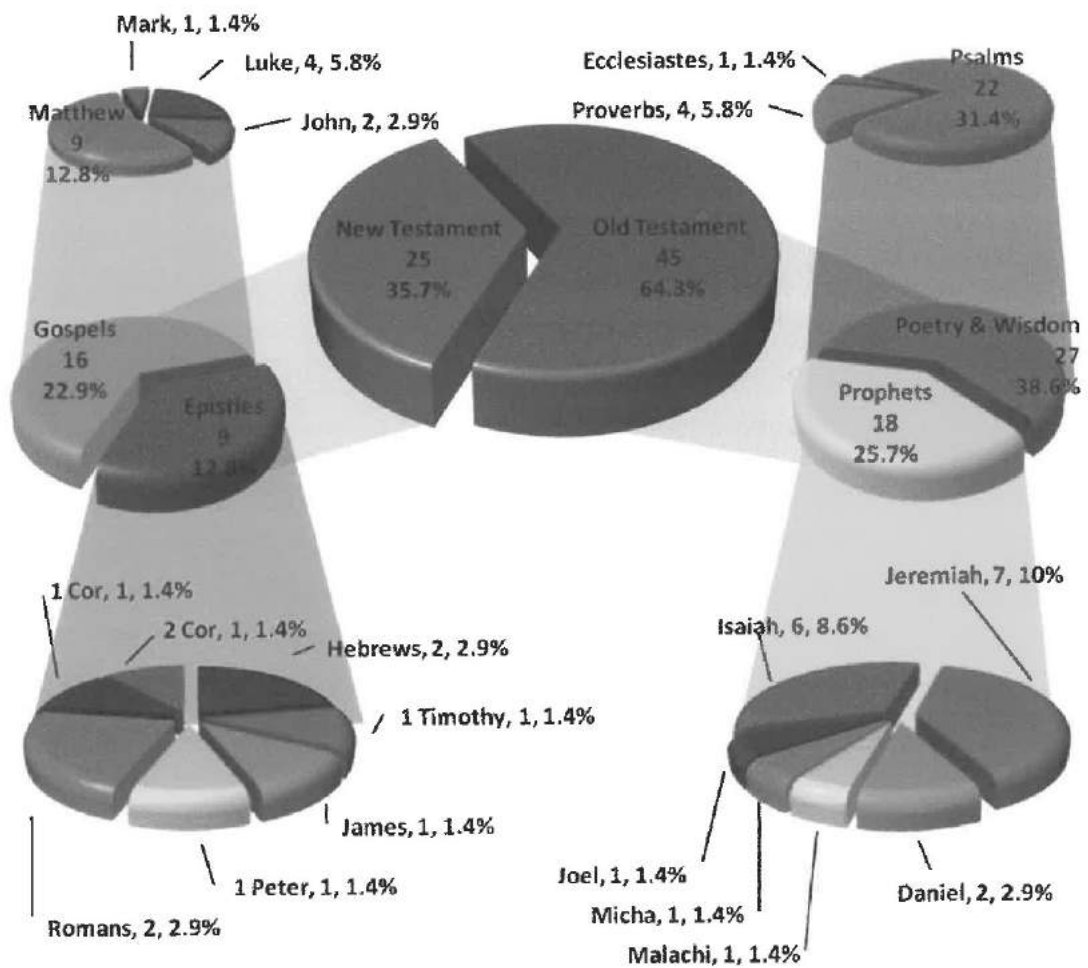
There was a definite time of bonding that took place in the group. After weeks of sharing their findings with one another you could evidence the opening of their hearts to God and to each other. As they would enter the room to prepare for *lectio* there was an air of expectancy that became very evident. The participants could not wait to hear what God had to say to them each day.

Outcomes

On the following page is Figure 3 which is a Scripture Incidence Analysis Chart. This chart reveals the incidence of the Scriptures that were used during the *lectio* sessions and recorded in the group's journal over the six month period. It is evidenced in the chart that 64.3% of the scriptures that were used for *lectio* were chosen from the Old Testament. 35.7% were from the New Testament. It is noted that 27 of the Old Testament readings were in Wisdom literature and Poetry with 22 of those being in the Psalms, versus 18 in the Prophets. The Psalms speak to everyone and in such a variety of

situations. In the New Testament 16 readings were from the Gospels versus 9 from the Epistles. Matthew came out ahead with 12.8% in the Gospel readings with Hebrews and Romans tying at 2.9% each.

Figure 3. Scripture Incidence Analysis from Group Lectio Divina



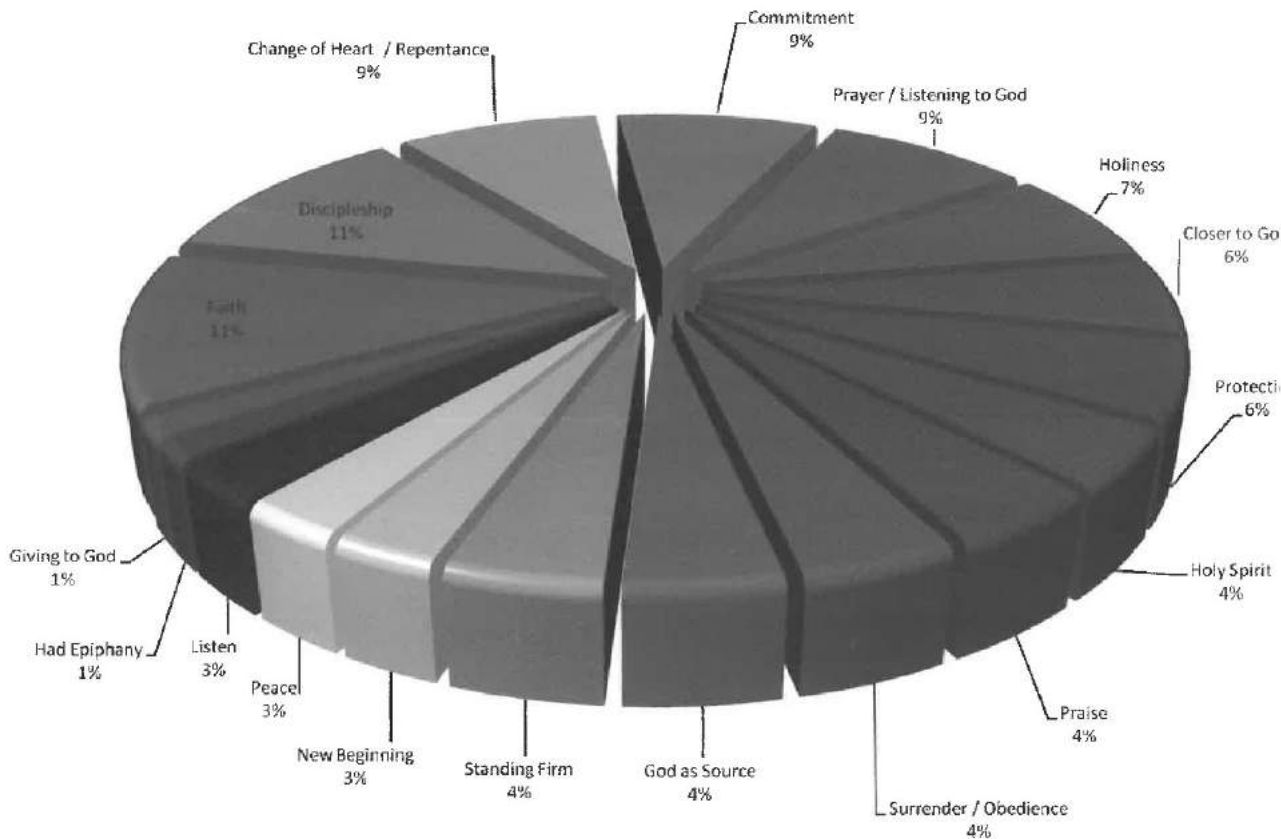
Source: Collation of Scriptures Taken from Group Lectio Divina Journal.

On the following page in Figure 4, is the Themes Chart which reveals the various themes that arose out of the *lectio* readings and journaling. Faith and discipleship came out on top with each holding at 11%. Coming in second is change of heart, prayer: listening to God, and commitment at 9%. In third place came Holiness at 7% with closer to God and protection close behind it at 6%.

It is interesting to note that Epiphany came in at one percent. That may seem like a small percentage but it tells a much larger story. Individuals in the group *lectio* did experience epiphanies and profound change. The first epiphany emerged at month four, revealing the fact that if you are faithful to the practice of *lectio* and the reading of the Word, that God will be faithful to you. The Word will bring enlightenment and transformation to the mind, heart and spirit of the individual.

One of the women in the group, Female #2, whom the writer will call Anne, gave the writer permission to share her revelation based on the Scripture, Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Anne had a profound moment of surrender after the reading of this scripture *lectio* style. She stated that she had been holding back on God. God had been calling her to step forward, that he had something that he was calling her to do. She was afraid. She surrendered to God's will and stated, "God is telling me not to worry. He will take care of my needs and now I believe it." She shared that she had the sense that she could abandon herself to the Lord and trust him more than ever with her future.

Figure 4. Themes Arising Out of Group Lectio Divina Sessions

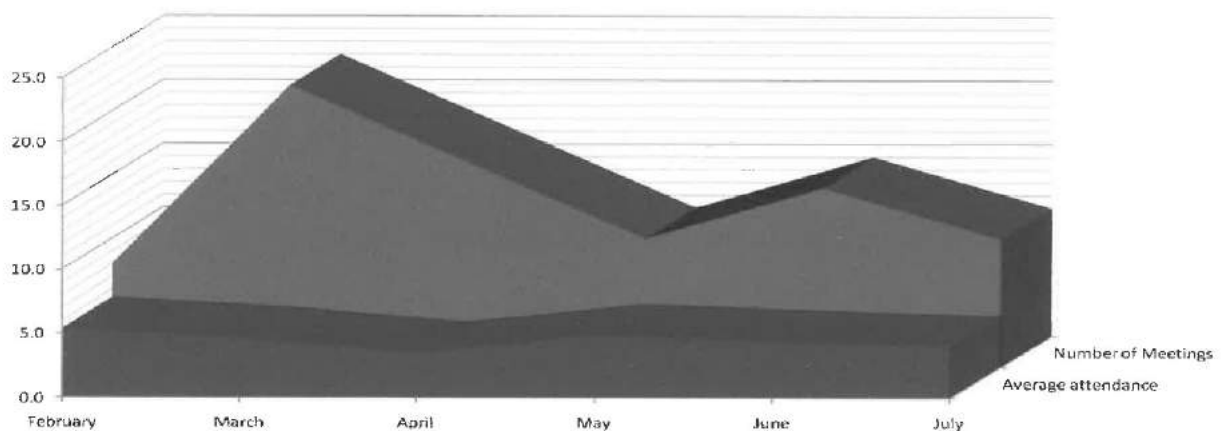


Source: Data Collated from Group Lectio Divina Journal.

Figure 5, on the following page, gives evidence to the steadiness of attendance. There is a definite dip in April when the Corps becomes very busy giving out food and preparing for Easter celebration. There is also a noticeable decline in the frequency of meetings as spring approaches and school proms and graduations are impending. There is an increase in attendance after these activities subside and there was a definite peak in meetings during a quiet time in March. There were no weeks evidenced when meetings

were not held and attended. People were as faithful as could be expected with all of life's demands and a heavy work load.

Figure 5. Attendance and Meetings for Group Lectio Divina Sessions



Source: Data was Recorded and Taken from the Group Lectio Divina Journal.

As in most studies, the findings are not just in the numbers but also in the personal and spiritual results. What was gained by participating in this study? Only the participants have that answer. Both of the men and three of the women desired to share the following comments.⁴

⁴ Participants comments were collected, May 30, 2008.

Study I: Individual Lectio Divina

Male # 1: "I have learned more and gotten more out of this than all my Bible studies for the last two years. I can't believe what has happened to me. I feel alive."

Male # 2: "I have been able to totally sense the presence of the Holy Spirit. I know that God is speaking to me. The Scriptures are coming alive. I can't wait for each day when we meet. It is like an adventure."

Female # 1: "I have never had the opportunity to see so many views of the mountain. When we do lectio together we get other views that are so meaningful."

Female # 3: "I can't wait for prayer time each day. I wish I could quit my job and just do this."

Female # 4: "I have never gone so deep. I met Jesus here."

Individuals stated that they felt a sense of presence, purpose, clarity and empowerment that they had not felt before. The writer did not receive negative feedback on group *lectio* which is in contrast to Study II Individual Lectio. People were engaged and faithful to the process and desired more. The mix of male and female did not pose a problem during the sessions. With this particular group the age differences ranging from the oldest at age 68 to the youngest at age 40 also did not seem to be a barrier. The writer suggests that due to different personality types, gender, or age, that a problem could arise and the leader must be on the alert for any such difficulties.

The main problem that arose in Study I was the busyness of the work at Bridges of Hope. There were times when it was hard to come aside and slow down. The busy and taxing nature of this type of ministry makes it very difficult at times to clear the

mind. The music and quiet time helped to calm the soul. Getting into a routine or rhythm also helps. The mind and body begin to adjust more quickly when it is in a regular routine. It can actually begin to crave the quiet time away with God. This is a great habit to form.

A reminder to Pastors and all who endeavor to practice group *lectio*, “confidentiality” is one of the biggest issues that must be dealt with. If the participants of group *lectio* are going to share and journal their findings, they must feel safe in the knowledge that what is said there, what is written there, stays there! As new participants join an existing group it is essential to clearly share with them the importance of confidentiality. Re-stating the confidentiality issue will serve as a reminder for everyone involved. Sharing intimately with others requires trust and that trust must be guarded.

Study II: Individual Lectio Divina

Study II, Individual *Lectio Divina*, began on April 1, 2008 and was completed July 31 of that same year. The study began with eight participants consisting of three men and five women. There were two married couples and the rest of the participants were single. The participants were given the article, *Accepting The Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, written by Fr. Dysinger and they received instruction on the four basic steps of individual *lectio divina*: Lectio—Reading, Meditatio—Meditation, Oratio—Prayer, Contemplatio—Contemplation.

After a period of coaching, each participant was given a copy of *The Message // Remix: Solo: An Uncommon Devotional* by Eugene Peterson,⁵ and was asked to read one devotional unit daily. They could read in order by calendar date, or randomly, it was their

⁵ Eugene Peterson, *The Message // Remix: Solo*, (Colorado Springs: Nav Press 2007).

personal choice. *The Message Solo* is a daily devotional that Peterson has designed, not only for Bible study, but to help the reader develop conversation with God. He explains that the devotionals are based on the “classic method of *lectio divina* which are reading, thinking praying and living the Scripture with the intention of inviting an infinite, omniscient God into your life.”⁶ Peterson inspires the reader by inviting him/her to develop the habit of *lectio divina* and therefore develop their relationship with God. He instructs the reader to keep with it. Practice makes perfect.

Each page contains a Scripture with a title that evokes a picture in your mind before you even begin to read. Following the Scripture there are instructions to: Read, Think, Pray, and Live. Peterson sees these elements as the four stages of *lectio divina*. He suggests that these elements may “overlap and weave into each other.”⁷ He tells the reader “Remember as you dive into this devotional that *lectio divina* is about wholeness: whole practice, whole Bible, whole God.”⁸ Peterson’s instructions are:

READ: read the passage slowly. “Eugene Peterson called the Bible ‘a book that reads us even as we read it.’” Peterson encourages each reader to discover what God desires to say to you each day. He includes an expanded passage to enhance the passage being read.

THINK: read the passage out loud. Each word is meant just for you. What touches your heart may change on a daily basis but they are for you, so listen. Peterson suggests starting with the slate wiped clean. Put aside whatever is on our mind that day. Take each word that God gives you and go over and over it in

⁶ Peterson, *The Message // Remix: Solo*, Introduction.

⁷ Peterson, *The Message // Remix: Solo*, Introduction.

⁸ Peterson, *The Message // Remix: Solo*, Introduction.

your mind. The more you think about the Word the more you will begin to hear God's voice.

PRAY: Talk to God. God wants to talk with you. Remember that he is interested in your needs, but beyond that, he is interested in communing with you. It is not wrong to put your needs before God but do not let it clutter up your time so that you cannot hear God speak to you. Spend some time praising God and you can journal or sing. Journaling may help as you put your thoughts and feelings down on paper.

LIVE: Peterson calls the reader to live in the Word. He calls the reader to action and change. If the Word changes you, there will be a natural result in the action of your reaching outside of yourself. This fourth section is in contrast to the other authors in Chapter three that see this fourth step more as a communing with God or a contemplative awakening and awareness: a loving gaze. This is a time when we are still before God and may be profoundly aware of God's presence in our lives. Peterson's fourth step is to be compared with the fifth and sixth steps that Pennington uses in *lectio*: *Compassio* and *Operatio*: compassion that leads to action. This could be misleading to a person who purchases the devotional and has had no previous experience with *lectio divina*.

An example of the outline for one of the daily devotions comes from day one. The devotion starts with the listing of the expanded passage for further study which is all of Genesis 3. The title of the reading is "Desire for Reconciliation" from Genesis 3:1-10. The participant is to read, *lectio* style, the scripture that is printed out for them in the devotional. The following page in the devotion contains the instructions to Read, Think,

Pray and Live, with comments pertaining to the Scripture following each title. Each daily reading is contained within two pages.

Participants

The Individual *Lectio* Study was very enlightening in the area of participation. The participants were eager to begin and one individual even asked to join the study, but at the conclusion, the results revealed that only 25% of the participants were able to finish. Out of the eight people that began only two were able to stick with the reading. These two women were mentioned earlier in Chapter 1 and briefly in Study I, Group *Lectio*. The writer named them Rose and Gloria. Their personal comments and exit interviews will be shared later in this section. The following information reveals the history of the six individuals that did not complete the Study for one reason or another.

The Six Participants Not Completing the Study

Participant # 1: is a male age 45. He is married with two children. He is a seasoned Christian and has attended Bridges of Hope for five months. He was very willing to begin the study but after a short time his response was "I read it (the devotional) for two days and threw it in the backseat of my car." He was very honest about the fact that he did not care for the devotional aspect of the reading. His life is busy and he is on the road each day. He could not seem to find the time or desire to come aside for a few minutes to read.

Participant # 2: is a female age 48. She is single and many of her work weeks are fifty to sixty hours long. She is a seasoned Christian and has been a member of Bridges of

Hope for over five years. She too was willing to begin the study but found that she did not have the time, was tired in the evenings, rushed in the morning, and embarrassed to tell me that she only read for one week. Grace was applied and she still has the devotional.

Participant # 3: is a male age 68. He has been a member of Bridges of Hope for over 5 years. He is a seasoned Christian and was part of the Group *Lectio* Study. He never missed a session of the group *lectio* but only participated in the Individual Study for one month. He stated that he didn't like practicing *lectio* alone. He said, "I got a lot more out of the group and listening to the inspiration that others received."

Participant # 4: is a female age 42. She is the wife of participant five. She and her husband have one child that is 2 years old. She has been attending Bridges of Hope for three years off and on. She has been a practicing Christian for several years but battles with bi-polar disorder. She and her husband are struggling financially due to low paying jobs. She was very excited about joining the study and took the devotional home and then returned for one for her husband. She continued in the study for approximately four weeks when her husband received a job offer out of state. They moved and took the devotionals with them. During the last contact the writer had with them they had not continued with *lectio divina*.

Participant # 5: is the husband of participant four. He is 55 years old and has attended Bridges of Hope more off than on. He has a working knowledge of Jesus Christ but is still searching for answers. He has been through many trials in his life and finds comfort when he does attend the Corps with his wife and son. He requested that he be included in

the study and participated until his move out of state. He had no personal comment on his experience. The pressures of his job and the move, was overwhelming.

Participant # 6: is a 35 year old woman that received Christ while attending Bridges of Hope. She was raised in a Jewish-Christian home and had many questions. She attends the Corps faithfully and has grown in her faith over the years. She has one child that has a disability which causes a lot of pressure in her life. She gladly accepted the invitation to join in the study. Although she reads her Bible and attends church faithfully, she got off track early in the study and made some negative choices. She exited the Individual Study before the end of the second month and declined making a statement.

The Two Participants Completing the Study

Participant # 7: is Rose. She is single, 42 years old, and is a seasoned Christian filled with Godly wisdom. She was a participant in the Group *Lectio* Study and was faithful to come as often as work would permit. She works the night shift (11pm to 7am) and would come to group *lectio* even if she had not slept. She has attended Bridges of Hope for four years and is active in ministry at the Corps. Rose not only finished the four months but went further on her own. She journaled faithfully and has given permission to share from her comment sheet that she was asked to write at the conclusion of the study. Also included are the remarks from her exit interview.

Participant # 8: is Gloria. She is a 58 year old woman, divorced with three grown children and four grandchildren. She came to Bridges of Hope when Rose brought her to woman's group. She had been involved in a church that is considered a cult. She was looking to be set free. It took two years of love and encouragement but she finally let go

and let God. She is now a glowing woman of God who hungers and thirsts after him. She has been faithful in attending the Corps and is active in serving. Gloria also was involved in the Group Lectio Study but could only come occasionally when time off from work permitted. Gloria also completed the Individual Study and went beyond the suggested time on her own. She has also given permission to share from her comment sheet that she was asked to write at the conclusion of the study and her exit interview.

Post-Individual Lectio Study Comments and Exit Interviews

A post-study exit interview was held with Rose and Gloria.⁹ The interview was held face to face with the writer in an informal setting at the writer's home. A pre-determined questionnaire was used as a guide but both participants were encouraged to share openly and outside of the questions posed to them. Both women were also asked to provide the writer with a personal comment sheet regarding their experience during the Individual Study. The comments were to be made from their journals or from their personal experiences. They were not given a specific criteria or outline but were asked to write from their heart's experience. Below are their comments and outcomes.

Comment Sheet: Rose

"Concerning lectio divina, I have done the noon-time group as well as the individual *lectio* and because of it my spiritual senses have blossomed. I am more confident in hearing the Lord. The Holy Spirit makes the written words of God come

⁹ The post-study exit interview sessions were held on June 12, 2010. The post-study comment sheets were collected at the same time.

alive. In divine reading with a group everyone can, and they do, see the hand and power of God the Holy Spirit move in a direct and mighty way.”

“It was very difficult to do *Solo* (the Message Solo) because I am not a reader or a writer. I read and write of course but I like to listen and talk. Recently I had to purchase the whole Bible on CD because I will surely listen and it has proven to be extremely helpful.”

When writing my thoughts or feelings, even though it was difficult at first, in writing I felt a certain relief, a cleansing.” “Looking back at my early notes there were times I was deep but to me it seemed I could not get as deep as I felt I should.” “At one point I changed my form from writing my thoughts on what the Solo was teaching to writing my thoughts without the Solo format. It made it much easier for me to write and it took less time. At one point I just wrote and stopped taking notes about what I was going to write.” “I tried to just write from my heart.”

“I felt more in tuned with the Holy Spirit and my feelings during lectio. I also felt good because I did this project for a good amount of time (over 300 days), longer than any project like this that I have attempted to do.” “Sometimes it was labor and sometimes it was liberating.” “During my time of reading I was able to express some deep hurt feelings concerning my sister.”

“Looking back, I would like to do *Solo* again but put my own thoughts down of what I thought the Word of the Lord was bringing out of me.” “Going from front to back (reading in calendar order) is out of the question for me. I can not do it like that, I am not very disciplined. I like to go on my feelings at the time. This is how I have learned all

my life.” “Solo would be good to do in conjunction with a good Bible study of all the books of the Bible.” (Rose chose her readings at random).

Concerning *lectio divina*, “Lectio divina is something that one just has to experience. It is the Holy Spirit experience combined with God divinely directing us through and to his living words to help us or others intimately.” “Lectio divina, divine reading to me was seeing the Holy Spirit move in all of our lives.” “I have seen the hand of God move in guiding me.”

Exit Interview: Rose

1. Do you feel that this study was helpful in your spiritual growth?

Reply: “Yes, I have grown spiritually and have a deeper walk with Jesus.”

“Practicing lectio and journaling pulled things out of me and forced me to look inside.” “I have seen God at work.” “He changed me inside.”

2. At the onset of the study, did you find the pre-instructional time helpful?

Reply: “Yes. We went over the instructions and I had been in the group lectio sessions so that helped me.”

3. Where did you practice your individual lectio?

Reply: “At home in my apartment. My home is my sacred space.” “I don’t let anything or anyone in my apartment that will disturb my spirituality.”

4. Was the introduction to *lectio* in *The Message Solo* helpful?

Reply: “In reading the directions, developing a conversation sounded wonderful and Bible basking sounds spirit quenching, but I found that the directions were short. I had instruction before I read them so I knew what to do.”

5. Did you find the format in the *Message Solo* conducive to *lectio*?

Reply: “I liked the readings. I would pick them out by the title and how I felt that day.” “I did not like the questions at the end of the reading. I would rather have just listened to Jesus.” “The questions got me off track.”

6. Would you use this tool again for *lectio*? Why or Why not?

Reply: “There are readings that I did not get to and would like to go back and read them at my own leisure.” “I would use the *Solo* again but I would like to use it with a Bible study instead of *lectio divina*.”

7. In contrast, did you prefer group or individual *lectio*?

Reply: “I loved the group *lectio* with all of the interaction and hearing what other people heard from Jesus but I must say that individual *lectio* took me to a deep place.”

8. Would you continue to practice *lectio* on your own?

Reply: “Yes, but I really enjoy the group *lectio* and being with other people. Now that I know how to do it, I can always practice *lectio divina* at home.”

9. Would you encourage others in the Church to participate in *lectio*?

Reply: “Yes. I know that the people that joined in the group *lectio* sessions heard from Jesus. We all need to hear from Jesus. It changes you. Many people are looking for more and *lectio divina* can help you get there.”

10. What suggestions would you have for others practicing *lectio*?

Reply: “Stick with it. Sometimes I felt like quitting and I got discouraged but I changed what I was doing and changed my journaling and it made a difference. You can be flexible and change the format if it does not work for you.”

Gloria: Comment Sheet

“I started out doing individual lectio pretty strong but as time went on I found it difficult to spend the time on individual lectio that I thought it required.” “In *The Message Solo*, some of the assignments I thought were good and the questions helped lead you into a deeper level of understanding of the scripture. There were other assignments I definitely did not get as much out of. The questions were leading and I could not identify with them and some of the Scripture readings were too long.”

“Over time I learned that He (Jesus) had been talking to me but I didn’t know it was Him or I ignored or over-rode Him. I learned to trust Him and what He was telling me and others which in turn also helped me in my relationships with God.”

“I have learned to acknowledge and trust the pictures, visions and dreams He has given me and others. In group *lectio*, sometimes He spoke in visions. He gave us words of knowledge, insight, prophecy and discernment.” “Corporate lectio builds and the presence of God comes. If everyone could experience that, no one would have to do drugs.” “During lectio you can have an Epiphany. It also increases your depth of knowledge.” “Now I see the word in many dimensions. Lectio has expanded the Word for me.”

Exit Interview: Gloria

1. Do you feel that participating in this study was helpful in your spiritual growth?

Reply: “Yes.” “I think it is so powerful to read scripture and listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to each individual and putting all the thoughts together is like looking in on the mind of God.”

2. At the onset of the study did you find the pre-instruction time *helpful*?

Reply: “Yes, I found it helpful. Individual lectio is different from group but the focus is the same, on the Word”

3. Where did you practice your individual lectio?

Reply: “At home in my kitchen. I sat at the kitchen table so I could journal. I had to work at staying focused. I have a problem with getting distracted.”

4. Was the introduction to lectio in *The Message Solo* *helpful*?

Reply: “Somewhat: the instructions were short and gave me the impression that each unit could be done in a short amount of time. I found that it took me an hour which was too long for me.”

5. Did you find the format in *The Message Solo* conducive to *lectio*?

Reply: “In this book the practice of lectio divina is inhibited by leading questions. It puts a prescribed direction in your thoughts so you aren’t available to hear what the Holy Spirit might be trying to get through to you.” I also like to study with a theme or topic. I think that they could have gotten deeper into a subject or theme if they brought them together in sections.” “I felt that the questions led you away from what the Holy Spirit was trying to say to you. The questions were from the mind of the author not the Spirit.”

6. Would you use this tool again for *lectio*? Why or Why not?

Reply: “I think that this book has its place and I will continue to use it, but it can’t take the place of practicing *lectio divina* with a small group of people and your Bible.” “I think that the scripture readings were too long. Sometimes shorter scriptures are better to start with.”

7. In contrast, did you prefer group or individual *lectio*?

Reply: “I met God in church, Jesus in small group *lectio*, but I really didn’t meet the Holy Spirit until these individual *lectio divina* sessions. I learned to listen and to actually hear Him.”

8. Would you continue to practice *lectio* on your own?

Reply: “Yes.”

9. Would you encourage others in the Church to participate in *lectio*?

Reply: “Yes, I highly recommend it. I met Jesus and the Holy Spirit during *lectio*. It brought me to a deeper walk and spiritual experience. It is not like reading and studying. I never encountered anything like *lectio* before. If anyone is looking for a deeper experience they need to try it.”

10. What suggestions would you have for others practicing *lectio*?

Reply: “Doing *lectio* has a snowball effect. The more you practice the more you grow. Stick with it.” “Keep the scripture short to start with and stay within the time limits that you are comfortable with.” “I had a problem staying in quiet time. Keep working at it.”

Outcomes

Both Rose and Gloria came to the conclusion that they liked group *lectio* but that individual *lectio* took them to a much deeper place. Their introduction to *lectio divina* was in the group setting and due to the evidence in their personal testimony it has become very evident that this had a strong influence on both participants. Both women enjoyed the group environment. They really were blessed by hearing the inspiration that others in the group were sharing and felt strength in the presence of the body. Rose is very verbal and enjoyed hearing others read the Scriptures. Because of this factor it made a great learning experience for her. Gloria was blessed by the Holy Spirit moving in the midst of the group. She was blessed to meet Jesus during group *lectio* but professed to meet the Holy Spirit during individual *lectio*.

Individual *lectio* was more of a challenge for both Rose and Gloria. Even though they struggled, both women continued to practice individual *lectio* way beyond the required time of the Study. Both Rose and Gloria encourage people to “stick with it.” It is easier to be monitored in a group setting than at home. When you come home tired or have had a bad day it can be a real challenge to stick with it and have your *lectio* session that day especially when no one is watching you. This is where the elements of intentionality and discipline enter the picture in order to stay on course. It is also important to know your limits. If you are too tired it may be more prudent to wait until another time when you are more refreshed.

Both Rose and Gloria experienced difficulty using *The Message Solo*. They commented that the section on Read, Pray, Think, and Live was very distracting for them. Their conclusion was that they had to focus on the Scripture readings and leave the

inspired questions for another time. They would rather focus on the Word and listen for the voice of God than focus on the suggestions regarding the Scripture. They also commented that the Scripture passages were long for beginners. The writer noted that often the readings were encompassing a total picture or thought so that they may be longer than a beginner would choose, but the author did keep his readings within biblical context.

Even though Rose and Gloria felt that *The Message Solo* was not designed well for individual *lectio*, both women grew from the readings and felt that it would make a great Bible study. There is no doubt that they were both touched by the suggestions regarding the Scriptures but in the end it did detract from their practice of *lectio*. The writer strongly suggests that if *The Message Solo* is going to be used in individual or group *lectio* that individuals use the Scripture to practice *lectio* and then move into the questions for a short Bible study time. Combining the two could bring the closeness to Christ that is desired and expansion of their understanding of the Word.

It is the writer's conclusion that because these women were introduced to group *lectio* first, they were accustomed to hearing the Word only and then listening for what God was speaking to them and the other participants. Adding comments and suggestions from the author distracted them from the original purpose for practicing *lectio*: communing with God through the Living Word. The writer advises beginners to stick to the Bible before moving to other *lectio* suitable materials. Keep it simple!

It was very evident at the time of the interviews that both Rose and Gloria have been changed because of their practice of *lectio divina*. They are experiencing a deeper quality within their spiritual lives that shows in their faces, in their voices and in their

countenance. There is an effervescence that is bubbling up from within them. They have gained a tool that they can continue to use for the rest of their lives.

Statistical Findings

The statistical findings in this study were very revealing. Only 25% of the individuals beginning the study completed it. 50% of the individuals that began the Study lasted one month and the remaining 25% lasted less than one month. As noted previously, the reasons for not continuing the study ranged from time constraints to personal choices and physical moves. The reality is that life gets in the way and that is an issue that the church and individuals constantly must wrestle with. These statistics were in stark contrast to the group *lectio* where attendance only dropped during busy times at the Corps. The group really does draw people together and it encourages the participants, not only to return, but to keep their spiritual eyes and ears open. It encourages community building and promotes accountability.

In the next study we will again evidence a group challenge. This time it is a Bible study. The writer was introduced to the following format by a former Salvation Army Officer that currently works for Scripture Union/USA, the company that produces this material. The Challenge appealed to the writer because it involved the study of the Word. Even though individuals read the Word during *lectio*, they are reading more for formation than information. Bible study gives the reader information that can also help them with their spiritual formation and closeness to Christ.

Study III: The E 100 Challenge Bible Study

Because of the importance of the Word in this work, the writer completed a third Study, the *E 100 Challenge* by Scripture Union.¹⁰ It became more evident during this process just how important it is that the people of God be familiar with his Word. Unfortunately, although Bible study is very important, too often it is not well attended at our Corps. If an individual has a basic understanding of the Bible when he engages in *lectio divina*, it gives the person a better picture of the God he is communing with and a foundation to build upon.

The writer must admit that this challenge presented itself to me. It got right up in my face and said, "I challenge you to do this." If you are going to teach your people to do *lectio divina* then I challenge you to get them involved in a good basic Bible study that will give them a foundation in the Word and introduce them to the Word, himself. The writer could not refuse, so let the challenge begin.

The E-100 (as it will be referred to from now on) is a Bible reading plan that lasts for 100 days. Each participant is given a pre-evaluation survey.¹¹ Following the survey they are given a book with 100 Bible readings that begin in Genesis and end in Revelation. The title of the book is *The Essential Bible Guide*.¹² They cover the 100 most basic stories in the Bible such as Creation, the Fall in the Garden, Moses, the Exodus, the Ten Commandments, the Patriarchs, the birth of Jesus, the teachings of Jesus and the miracles of Jesus. The main focus is to follow the big themes and get the big picture of what Scripture is all about. Their ultimate goal is for people to meet God.

¹⁰ Whitney T. Kuniholm, *The Essential 100 Challenge: The Bible Reading Plan People Love to Complete*, (Scripture Union: USA.2003).

¹¹ Permission to use E-100 materials given by Scripture Union.

¹² Whitney T. Kuniholm, *The Essential Bible Guide*, (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2003).

Each individual is asked to read the daily Scripture in their Bible and then read the comments provided in the book that encourage conversation. A card with numbered punch out circles that correspond to the readings is given to each participant so that they can track their progress. For group leaders, they provide a discussion guide with the basic themes for each of the 100 readings. Each member of the group is asked to read ahead and make notes if they desire to do so. The group leader then encourages conversation by referring to the theme presented and the content of the Scripture. People may share from their notes if they choose to do so.

This study was amazing. The group started with ten people and blossomed into three groups before it was completed. The writer must point out that the multiplication of the groups speaks for itself regarding the success of the Bible study, but only the original group was tracked and only these results will be reported. Many of the participants in the original group encouraged others to try the Bible study because it was understandable and related to their daily lives.

All of the participants in the test group were women. Each person signed a commitment form to join in and read God's Word. The form contained the name and address of Bridges of Hope and stated: A 100-Day commitment to read God's Word (8/5/09-11/12/09) I am committed for 100 Days to join with others and read God's Word. Each woman signed the sheet. Following the signature they were given the pre-evaluation survey which they all filled out. At the conclusion of the Bible study they were given a post-evaluation survey. Both surveys have been adapted from the original E-100 format and can be viewed in Appendix B.

Findings

Table 1. Pre-Evaluation Survey Findings Profile

Gender

Male.....	0%
Female.....	100%

Race

African-American.....	0%
Asian.....	0%
Hispanic.....	0%
Native American.....	10%
White.....	80%
Other.....	10%

Age

Under 40.....	30%
40-49.....	10%
50-59.....	20%
60 and over.....	20%
No Response.....	20%

Participation in Sunday School/Christian Education?

Yes.....	20%
No.....	80%
Don't know.....	0%

Participation in group Bible study?

Yes.....	40%
No.....	60%

Attend Worship Service Saturday/Sunday

Weekly.....	90%
Monthly.....	10%
Yearly.....	0%
I do not attend church.....	0%

How many years have you been a follower of Christ?

0-10 years.....	10%
10-15 years.....	10%
20-30 years.....	30%
30-40 years.....	20%
No response.....	30%

In the last seven days how many minutes reading or listen to scripture?

Daily.....	50%
Twice a week.....	30%
Three times a week.....	10%
No response.....	10%

In the last seven days how many minutes did Bible reading or listening last?

10 minutes.....	10%
20 minutes.....	30%
30 minutes.....	10%
1 hour.....	30%
No response.....	20%

Read through entire Bible

Never attempted.....	40%
Attempted but did not complete.....	30%
Yes, finished one time.....	20%
Yes, finished more than one time.....	10%

Attend Worship Service Saturday/Sunday

Weekly.....	60%
Monthly.....	0%
Yearly.....	0%
I do not attend church.....	0%

Table 2. Post-Evaluation Survey Findings

In the Post-Evaluation Survey only 60 % of the participants were able to respond.

Gender

Male.....	0%
Female.....	100%

Age

Under 40.....	20%
40-49.....	10%
50-59.....	20%
60 and over.....	10%
No Response.....	40%

Participation in Sunday School/Christian Education?

Yes.....	0%
No.....	60%
Don't know.....	0%

Participation in group Bible study?

Yes.....	60%
No.....	0%

How many Bible readings did you complete?

0-25.....	0%
25-50.....	10%
50-75.....	40%
75-100.....	10%

In the last seven days how many minutes did Bible reading or listening last?

10 minutes.....	0%
20 minutes.....	0%
30 minutes.....	50%
1 hour.....	10%
No response.....	0%

The E-100 Challenge has greatly aided me in the development of the daily application of the Bible in my personal life?

Strongly Agree.....	60%
Agree.....	0%
Disagree.....	0%
Strongly Disagree.....	0%

There has been a major increase in my desire to read the Bible because of the E-100 Challenge?

Strongly Agree.....	30%
Agree.....	20%
Neither.....	10%
Disagree.....	0%
Strongly Disagree.....	0%

There has been a major increase in my closeness to Christ because of the E-100 Challenge?

Strongly Agree.....	50%
Agree.....	10%
Neither.....	0%
Disagree.....	0%
Strongly Disagree.....	0%

In the E-100 study, 60 % of the women chose to undertake the study in a group setting while 40% chose to do the study individually. The participants ranged in age from 31yrs. to 72 yrs. with seven women reporting their age and three abstaining. 90 % of the women reported being white with 10% designating other.

In the response to attendance at Sunday School-Christian Education and the following question regarding Bible study, it was not surprising to see an answer of 80% did not attend any class or study and only 20% did. On the exit interview Bible study increased to 100% due to the study.

90% of the participants attend Worship weekly with 10% or one individual reporting attending monthly. 70% of the women reported that they had been following Jesus long term, and three abstained. 50% of the women reported that they read the Bible daily reading for 30 minutes to one hour. 30% reported reading 2-3 times weekly for twenty minutes to one half hour and 20% abstained. It was very interesting to note that 30% of the women had read through the Bible at least one time and one woman had read through several times. 30% reported attempting to read through but did not finish with 40% reporting that they had never tried.

The Exit Interview was completed by 60% of the women. This was due to the time of year and busyness of the women. Some of them had gone to visit family for the holidays. One woman went to Florida for the winter. There was very positive feedback on the Exit Interview. Participants commented that they grew spiritually during the Study. One of the women stated "I have had a renewed awakening." Another woman, in her response to the question asking if there had been a substantial increase in her biblical

awareness stated, "This study made me aware of the Bible's connectedness to daily living." She also commented that she "really enjoyed the study."

The exit interview did not record any alarming changes but it did reveal that the women were increasing their time reading the Bible and enjoying it more. 40% reported reading 50-75 of the readings and one woman reported finishing all 100.

When the women were asked why they accepted the challenge they stated that they needed it, wanted to join the group, they enjoy a challenge and that it would help them to get back into reading the Word.

The Challenge had a positive impact on the women sharing their renewed interest in Bible study. The spin off groups began because of the women's personal recommendations. It is like anything else in life, if you try it and like it you will tell someone else about it. Encouraging others goes a long way to changing lives.

The E-100 is very user friendly and the women liked the fact that it was easy for them to access and understand. The participants reported that they could see different ways to apply the Scriptures to their lives. The Word became more relevant to these women which will bring transformation, strength and hope into their lives. Because each participant has their own materials, if you can not make it to group you can always do the lesson at home on your own and keep up with everyone else.

In conclusion, the women in the group setting fared better than the women in the individual Study. Only one of the women in the individual study group read 50-75 of the daily readings versus three in the group setting. The group encouraged one another and provided accountability. There was time for sharing during the group and the women reported being enriched by that experience. Due to the fact that one woman reported

having a “renewed awakening,” the results of the study demonstrate that change does take place when a person chooses to enter the Word. Isaiah 55:10-11 says, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it”. If we will continue to enter the Word through reading, study and the art of *lectio divina*, we will yield a harvest spiritually.

In Chapter five the writer will be demonstrating the conclusions of the studies. It is the writer’s heartfelt desire that as people come to know Christ that they do not stop there but begin a lifelong journey that will not end until they go home to be with him. There is so much that everyone can learn about God, but as his sons and daughters we have the opportunity to “know” God in an intimate way. We have the opportunity to become Christlike and to be transformed from the inside out. The world cannot give us what we crave as Christians. Psalm 20:7 says, “some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” Mere worldly power can not accomplish what God can. Our help for change “comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth”. (Psalm 121:2) It is up to each individual to seek God but it is also the church’s task to recognize what the people of God are lacking and begin to offer ways for people to grow in their relationship to Christ and in their Christlikeness. Christ and knowing him is the key to transformation.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

A Living Hope

In I Peter 1:1, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,” is writing a letter to “God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.” In this greeting Peter states in verse 2 that these Christians “have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.” Peter is greeting his fellow Christians, both Jews and Gentiles that were scattered throughout Asia Minor. The Apostle Paul points out in this scripture that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in the redemption of souls and that through the Spirit that man will be guided through the process of sanctification. It takes a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for man to begin and complete his spiritual journey.

Paul continues on in verses 3-4 to praise God for a living hope. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you.” In order for a person to have beauty for ashes they must have a living hope and that hope is found in the Word, Jesus Christ. In the writer’s opinion there is no real hope outside of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. He is our hope and our future. Jesus is our hope in the midst of

suffering and trials. He can break the bondages of sin, heal, transform and turn a person's life totally around.

In John 14 Jesus is comforting his disciples. He has been talking to them about his departure and Thomas says to him, “‘Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’” Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you would know my Father as well. From now on you do know him and have seen him’”(v. 5-7). Jesus is the way to the Father. He is our connection. He is seated “at the right hand of God interceding for us” (Romans 8:34b). Paul assures us in Hebrews 7:24-25, “because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” The prophecy that came forth in Isaiah 61 clearly reveals what Christ came for.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” (Isaiah 61:1-3a)

This is an incomparable list of things that the world cannot produce. This type of change only comes from the inside out by the power of God. It does not matter where a person has been or what a person has experienced, Jesus can bring hope and transformation to that life. He can take the ash heaps of our broken lives and bring beauty from it if we will let him.

The Church

It has been demonstrated in this work that The Salvation Army has been called to dispense the love of God in a very broken world. The founder, William Booth, reached out to the most unloved and unlovely population in England, people that the rest of England had written off. Is it any surprise considering the fact that Jesus also ministered to the homeless, the halt, the lame and the blind. He ministered to the prostitutes, tax collectors and the despised of his generation. The writer does not claim to have a more difficult ministry than others, but there are many churches, even today, that would not welcome some of the very broken and down and out people that The Salvation Army reaches. It was a challenging but rewarding experience to offer the opportunity for deeper spiritual growth to this population. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, there must be a foundation laid down for people to build upon. Many individuals have never been to church or read the Bible. They are confused and hurting when they first arrive at the Corps and in order to grow they must feel safe and begin to grow bit by bit. Pastors and lay leaders as well as more mature believers must come alongside each person and mentor them.

In Chapter one Leigh Gardner lovingly shared the poem that she had written titled "Heal Me." She so openly speaks of knowing she is lost and cries out for healing. She feels like dying while walking towards darkness. She fights to be free. She continues to cry out for healing. Just when she is exhausted and feels all alone, she senses the touch of God and can begin to see the light. Something begins to come alive in her and hope springs into her being. She has let the light in. She no longer is alone. Now there are

Jesus, the Word. Leigh has been part of Bridges of Hope for several years and has grown tremendously. She is a wonderful example of Isaiah 61, beauty for ashes. Her life has been transformed and she continues to grow in her faith and walk with Christ.

The writer is in agreement with Dallas Willard that the human heart is at the root of the problem and that our hearts need total renovation. It will take each person a different length of time to admit that he/she is a sinner and they need change in their lives and come to a place of surrender. But quite often there is another underlying problem. Individuals do not know that change is available and they do not understand how that change can materialize. Even individuals that have been Christians for a substantial period of time may not know or believe that change is possible depending upon what their teaching has been. There are many Christians today that are hurting and still do not understand that there is hope for transformation. They hold hope in their hands every time they pick up their Bibles and still do not find that closeness that they hunger for. They lack intimacy with the Word. The Church needs to offer hope to its people.

This issue brings us to another finding. Again, as James Wilhoit says in his book *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, “Spiritual formation is the task of the church. Period.”¹ Wilhoit states that spiritual formation is not an option but “is at the heart of its whole purpose for existence.”² The church has a powerful role in the spiritual formation of individuals as well as the corporate body. This can be done, not only through discipleship, but by much needed spiritual training and leadership. The church at large has turned to programs of one type or another or they tend to go toward fashionable trends. What is up and coming today? They look at the outward signs and ask the

¹ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 15.

² Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 15.

trends. What is up and coming today? They look at the outward signs and ask the question, why is one church or another growing so fast? Then they think that there must be a program that they can adopt to promote growth. They may choose the option of studying church growth but by making this choice are they leaving out the real reason for change and growth, God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. We have led the horses to water but have not given them anything to drink, so to speak. We introduce them to the waters of salvation and lead them in up to their ankles, but neglect to offer them deeper waters to swim in. Starting more programs is not the answer. Becoming Christlike and sharing the hope that Christ holds for mankind is.

The Salvation Army has been flowing in this stream. They are very program oriented and it is the writer's experience that the busyness of programs and the busyness of the ministry is a detriment to soul searching and coming closer to Christ. Quite often a Salvation Army Officer is so busy helping people that their time for communion with Christ is put aside. The focus of the ministry needs to undergo a paradigm shift and get back to basics. Jesus, the Word, must hold the central place in our heart and in our everyday lives. This may sound like a simple finding, but it truly is a very difficult balance to achieve and maintain.

In Revelation 2, we see the letters that John wrote regarding the seven churches (as revealed to him by Jesus). These churches were historic churches of Asia Minor and some believe that the letters are a preview of church history in a downward spiral. The other view is that they describe the characteristics of various types of congregations that existed. It is not difficult to place yourself or your congregation in one or more of these churches if honesty prevails. It is within the first church, the church of Ephesus that the

writer sees a major problem lurking today. John writes, “to the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walk among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you can no longer tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love” (vs.1-4). If our busyness gets in the way of our relationship with Christ then we have gotten off track. Christ calls us to repent and get back to basics. Our love and relationship with Christ must come first. In the conclusion of the letter to the church in Ephesus we read, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (v. 7). Oh what precious promises we have from God. There is nothing that the world can offer mankind that can even hold a candle to what God has for us. No program can imitate or produce the spiritual connection that we can have with God through Jesus.

Every church and every individual are different. Every person has their own fingerprints, no two are alike. Pastors and leaders must pray and spend time getting to know their congregation and what their needs are. They need to take seriously the spiritual climate of their congregation. There can be several levels of maturity taking place at one time within any group of people. Check out the climate and see who is ready to go deeper into the things of Christ. Some individuals in the congregation may be ready for a basic Bible study. Introducing them to the Word of God will begin the foundation on which they can build upon. For those a little more advanced I suggest

starting with some group *lectio divina*. This will allow the participants to learn from one another and it also promoted community building. When you recognize that individuals want to go even deeper, offer them some instructional sessions in individual *lectio*. Encourage them to journal and follow their progress with encouragement. Let the participants know that you are interested in how they are doing and that you are open to discuss their progress or give continued help and support.

Pastors

Pastors and leaders often neglect their own spiritual health and there may be blocks that keep them from exploring options for spiritual growth. Fear of change and losing control can keep people in bondage, including the leadership. Check your spiritual status to make sure that you are not caught in this scenario. Also, individuals are often afraid to cross denominational boundaries and read materials that have a history in another church. We must pray and have an open spirit. That can help us to overcome our prejudices and see the blessings of the legacy that has been left to all Christians.

Pastors as well as parishioners often do not know what is available to them. Even individuals that come from a Roman Catholic background that has a wealth of history in spiritual formation and reading the Word prayerfully, may never have heard of *lectio divina*. Often individuals stumble across these nuggets of spiritual gold and must mine them out by themselves. As individuals and groups learn about and practice *lectio divina* they can share their experiences with others and point them in the right direction. The writer suggests buying a book for a friend or your Pastor. Ask them to read it along with you so that you can discuss it together. This can open a door for new opportunities.

Busyness

Busyness is found to be one of the biggest hindrances to growing in Christ-likeness. This issue surfaced in all three of the studies. For many, it was every day life got in the way. People are under a lot of pressure with work, some work two jobs and in most families the husband and wife both work. New Englanders are especially known for their non-stop activity. We try to pack as much into one day as possible. The noise in our lives is intrusive and keeps us on edge so that we can not relax and enter into the sacred place that we so desire in our hearts to visit. The human heart is deceitful and tricks us into believing that we do not need God on a deeper level. These factors are major deterrents to spiritual growth. The percentage of people finishing the studies was low largely due to the busyness factor. Busyness can also be an excuse so that one does not have to stop and take the inward glance. If you keep running the only results you will have is a vicious cycle. In Alcoholics Anonymous there is a saying that goes: What is the definition of insanity? It is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results. We must get off the treadmill and get walking on the path toward our goal.

Breaking the cycle of busyness is not an easy task but it is doable. The trials revealed that the groups, both in *lectio* and Bible study, fared better than the participants that were involved in individual *lectio* and individual Bible study. Keep in mind that some people may feel more comfortable in a group while others will not. The following suggestions reveal feedback on the studies that provide food for thought and will help when deciding what is best for your congregation.

Provide an environment conducive to becoming quiet and still. Try using music to break the sound barrier from the world. Keep lighting at a lower level and provide comfortable seating. Encourage people that are beginning individual *lectio* to find their own private, sacred space. Pick a time that is best for you and your family so that you will not be interrupted. Turn off the cell phones and electronics unless you are doing *lectio* on line. Everyone needs to get un-plugged during this time. Learn good breathing techniques and relax your body. Make a list of things that interrupt your time with God and work on eliminating one thing at a time.

Learn to prioritize. Quite often, upon examination, our priorities may be out of order and need a little straightening out. By not prioritizing we can set ourselves up for failure! There are many things in our busy lives that can be eliminated. Choose wisely! And finally, be flexible. Allow change to come if you sense that things are not flowing well. Sometimes change can be just the thing that is needed. Both Rose and Gloria found that they had to change their methods to maximize their results.

Benefits of a Group Setting

It was evidenced in the Group *Lectio* Study that participants gave encouragement to one another. They spurred one another on and helped new people feel comfortable when entering the group after it had already begun. The group participants, both in *lectio* and Bible study, enjoyed the fellowship.

The groups provided a wider experience in the Word. More views were expressed and heard. Spiritual experiences were shared and journaled. During the time of sharing, Scriptures were able to be applied to everyday life and the personal needs and

circumstances of the individual participants. They received more than one view of the mountain.

A higher level of accountability was evidenced among the participants. The group seemed to draw people back to it because of the group strength. Participants were anxious to meet again and experience the Word together. In Matthew 18:20 Jesus says, “For where two or three come together in my name; there am I with them.” Participants experienced the presence of the Word.

The groups grew because of the participants sharing their experiences and spiritual growth with others outside of the original group. It is the natural overflow of the workings of God that shine through and attract others. It is also the excitement of the participants that ignites a spark in the hearts of people outside of the original group.

As the group *lectio* participants continued on their journey they became hungry for more time with God. It took time for them to quiet down and separate from the busyness and the noise of the world, but as they continued to practice *lectio* it became more of a routine in their lives. By the end of the study they were craving time alone with God and could hardly wait to get to their session. The continual practice of *lectio divina* by these participants created a hunger in them. Jesus tells us in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” When we continue to seek and practice, we will be filled, and sometimes filled to overflowing.

The writer strongly advises leaders to consider beginning a *lectio* group session in their church or in a home setting. This can be the start of expanding the horizons of your spiritual community. It will not take long for the word to spread and other groups to

form. There is a Christian song written by Kurt Kaiser called *Pass it On*. The first line says, “It only takes a spark to get a fire going.” Before you know it that spark turns into a full fire and will burn brightly within the hearts of your people. This will not only initiate transformation within each individual but will transform the dynamics of the congregation, one person at a time.

Individual Lectio

The Individual *Lectio* Study results revealed that discouragement was a big factor. It was more difficult for the participants to keep going on their own. Adjustments had to be made to lifestyles and adjustments had to be made to the tool that was used. Both women used wisdom when realizing that the Solo was not completely working for them. They made adaptations and still continued on with the study.

Rose and Gloria encouraged people to stay on track. Even though the women documented that they struggled, both of them exceeded the time period set for the study. Because they both stuck with it they had deep personal experiences with God. Sometimes we feel like giving up with things do not go as planned. Keep on keeping on because there are untold benefits and blessings waiting for you. Gloria documented meeting the Holy Spirit during her individual *lectio* experience. That experience in itself made it all worth it. When you enter the Word and open your heart there are not limits to what you can experience with God. *Lectio divina* is a journey of the soul that absolutely can bring you into communion with God through the Divine Word. Gloria will never be the same.

Transformation will take place when your hearts are open to the love that God has for you. We must get to the end of self and get to the beginning with God. Rose

experienced difficulty in journaling her experience but kept with it. During her time with God she received a revelation that brought healing in her heart and soul. She had a burden lifted. Her steps are lighter today as she continues her walk with the Lord. It is heartbreaking to think that many participants did not finish and did not experience profound change.

Spiritual formation is not a spectator sport. We have put the Gospel on the shelf to collect dust. Jesus is the revelation of God so the Gospel will challenge us. We will not gain spiritual maturity and transformation if we do not take the Bible off the shelf, dust it off, open it up and read.

It is necessary for the leader that is instructing the participants to be sure to go over the four stages of *lectio* even if they have practiced individual *lectio*. The stages are more defined in individual *lectio* and the participant does not have other voices to hear. They need to realize that they will be listening for God's voice as they did in group, but the absence of the other's voices may have an impact at the onset. You may want to encourage the participants to journal so that they can go back and reflect their thoughts and impressions. Remind the participants that this is a flow, a back and fourth motion at times. Let the Word and the Spirit move and interweave as they will. Advancing in our Christlikeness does not come by knowledge but by knowing the author of the book (Bible). This is not a time of memorizing but internalizing the Living Word.

Introducing Lectio

As stated previously, the group setting may be the best place to start *lectio divina*, depending on the needs of your congregation. The writer introduced *lectio* into the

noontime prayer group. This turned out to be a good place to start due to the fact that *lectio* is praying the Scriptures. The practice just fit right into the stream of things. You also could introduce *lectio* at a woman's ministry group or any small group that has come together for a period of time. Rose and Gloria reported that it was not a difficult transition to individual *lectio* after practicing in a group.

Make sure that you have a book or teaching tool available. The outline that the writer used came from an online resource that is listed in Chapter 4. There are many sites that give good solid descriptions of the process of *lectio divina*. You can keep the process as simple as you need to. Don't complicate matters! The desired result is that the participants will feel comfortable with trying this new avenue of achieving intimacy with God.

One of the side benefits of *lectio* is that it is portable. You can take the Word with you almost anywhere you go. *Lectio* can be practiced at home, at the park, in your sacred space, or on line at work with a friend. Choose your reading material wisely. If you do not have your Bible with you, you can go on line and access sites such as Biblegateway.com. There are versions of the Bible available on CDs and now on Kindle. You can download many resources. We have more options available than ever. There are Bible studies available online for free. You can access them by typing in the word Bible study and the book of the Bible or the topic that you desire to study into the search engine and then scroll down and check out the variety of studies that are available to you. Remember, the Bible on CD and online *lectio*, large font, can be a blessing for the sight impaired.

Choosing Your Tools

It was very evident in the Individual *Lectio* Study that both Rose and Gloria had trouble using *The Message Solo*. They commented that the section on interactive questions was very distracting for them. Their decision was to forego that section. They would rather focus on the Word itself and listen for the voice of God than focus on the suggestions regarding the Scripture. Both women grew from the readings and felt that it would make a great Bible study. There is no doubt that they were both touched by the suggestions regarding the Scriptures but in the end, it did detract from their practice of *lectio*.

It is the writer's conclusion that because Rose and Gloria had both practiced group *lectio* first, using only the Bible, they were accustomed to reading and hearing the Word only and then listening for what God was speaking to them at the time. Adding comments pulled them away from the original purpose for practicing *lectio divina*, communing with God through the Living Word. The writer strongly advises, especially for beginners, only the Bible should be used. There are many other resources and wonderful books by the Church Fathers that would be suitable for *lectio* when the individual is more advanced in their practice.

Dropout Rate

Do not be discouraged when people drop out. Plan ahead and know that a certain percentage of people will not stick with it. In the Individual *Lectio* Study only 25% of the people finished. If we look at the Parable of the Sower in Luke 5:5-15, Jesus does not conceal the fact that only 25% of the seed produced a bountiful harvest.

In the parable only one out of four plots of ground produced abundantly. The first plot of ground is hard and trampled upon. The seed could not take root and the birds came and ate it. The second piece of ground is stony, just like our hearts can be, the third has briars which represent the cares of the world that choke us, but the fourth is well plowed and ready to receive the seed which is the Word. It is obvious that the heart of man is not always ready to receive the Word or when it is received the enemy of our soul steals it. Sometimes the cares of the world and our busyness come to rob us, but for those who will say yes to God and “stick with it,” as Rose and Gloria recommend, there are untold blessings to be reaped. You will see some participants get to different stages but then stop their progress. Be patient and offer them something that is doable for them such as a daily Bible reading or short Bible study, just to whet their spiritual appetites. If people can succeed with small challenges, they often will try bigger ones.

Intentionality

It is very evident that intentionality plays a vital role in the transformation process. Once a person engages in the process of *lectio divina* and gets a taste of the connection that comes through entering the Word, a hunger and thirst develops. The church needs to discover new ways to offer living water to a thirsty world. The individuals that participated in the E-100 Study signed a commitment sheet before they began. Actually signing your name can have a powerful effect on your level of commitment. Encourage one another. Keep on trying and don't be afraid to change things up if it is not working for you. You can change the time or place that you are reading. Make sure that you are comfortable and that the atmosphere is conducive to

lectio or study. There needs to be a willingness to surrender to the process and let the Word work in your heart. If you are faithful you will reap the benefits.

Union with God is the Ultimate Goal

All that is written within these pages and the studies that were done had one goal in mind: that the participants would achieve union with God and through that union transformation would take place within their hearts and lives. For those who continued with the process, deep experiences and changes were documented.

As Christians, we are a blessed people. God has given us accessibility to him through his Word, Jesus Christ. When Jesus was crucified and died on the cross the curtain in the Temple was torn in two. This gave us access to the Throne Room. We have the ability to be in God's presence. We need to take advantage of this gift of grace and share it with others. Again, prioritize. What is really important to you? If you are in the middle of a spiritual desert you will crave a drink from the thirst quenching Word. Like water, we must have the Word to live. John 6 gives us the Bread of Life Discourse. Jesus has just fed 5000 people. He has crossed the lake and the crowds find him. Jesus accuses the crowd of following him for the wrong reasons:

I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” (vs. 26-27a.) “Then they asked him, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’ So they asked him, ‘What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘always give us this bread.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever

comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. (John 6: 28-40)

What are our motives? Sometimes we are following Jesus for the wrong reason, perhaps, just for what we can get from him. It is relationship that his is looking for. He is more than willing to feed us if we just follow him and chew on his Word.

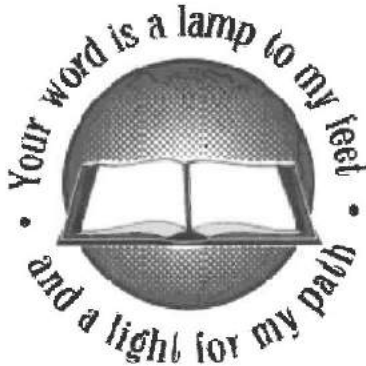
Where to go from here

It is the writer's desire to point people in the right direction and to give them encouragement and the tools to begin their journey of transformation through the Word via *lectio divina*. One of the main conclusions that the writer has drawn is that *lectio divina* is not widely understood or practiced in many churches. Because of this situation the writer has designed a one day seminar that will introduce individuals and groups to *lectio divina* and give them a chance to experience the practice for themselves. It is the hope of the writer that in its simplicity, the seminar will be an event that most individuals that gain a grasp of *lectio divina* can replicate in their home church. It is the ultimate goal of the writer that a spark will be ignited within the hearts and souls of individuals as they enter the Word of God at a deeper level and that it will move them toward union with God. On the following pages the writer has illustrated an invitation, outline, detailed outline and a running dialogue of the seminar that can be used to introduce *lectio divina* to any individual or group inside or outside of the church. Illustrations for the seminar are in Appendix A beginning on the following page.

APPENDIX A

SEMINAR ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 3 Seminar Invitation



Taking an Inward Glance

Praying the Word via Lectio Divina

A One Day Seminar

Are you feeling spiritually out of tune? Perhaps you need a day away to experience the refreshment of praying the Scriptures. Lectio divina is the Ancient Art of prayerful reading. Although it is a technique that has been practiced for centuries it is not widely known by many Christians. A tool of spiritual formation, lectio divina is experiencing a renewal in this generation. Come and be refreshed and learn a simple way of drawing closer to Christ through the Word.

What to Expect

Our one day seminar will begin at 10 a.m. at --Your Churches Name Here

- Welcome and Introductions
- The history of lectio divina
- Why is lectio divina pertinent to our Christian generation?
- Why haven't we heard about lectio divina before?
- The relevance of the Scriptures today?
- Lunch break
- The dynamics of lectio divina
- Pointers
- Small group participation
- Summary and sharing
- Homeward bound 3 p.m.

Why Attend

Even the strongest Christians can struggle in the world that we are living in. There are many things in our lives that pull us in one direction or another such as jobs, family, responsibilities and the things of this world. Christians are finding that they are drained and thinking, there must be more? For many Christians, the connection that they once had with Christ seems to be fading. Learning the Ancient Art of lectio divina can renew your relationship with Christ and re-ignite the spark that may be going out. You can begin a new journey of transformation as you enter the Word of God.

What to Bring

- Your Bible
- A notebook and pen

Save the Date

Date:

Time:

Place:

Contact Information:

Directions:

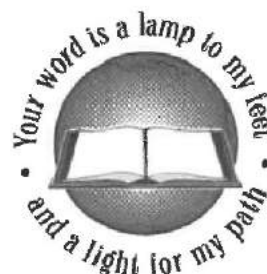


Illustration 4. One Day Seminar Outline and Timeline

Taking an Inward Glance Praying the Word via Lectio Divina One Day Seminar Outline and Timeline

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| 1. Welcome and introductions | 10 a.m. |
| 2. The history of lectio divina | 10:30-10:45 |
| 3. Why is lectio divina pertinent to our Christian generation? | 10:45-11 |
| 4. The relevance of Scripture today | 11-11:10 |
| 5. Break | five minutes |
| 6. The dynamics of lectio divina | 11:15-12noon |
| 7. Lunch break | 12- 12:45 |
| 8. Pointers and tips | 12:45-1:15 |
| 9. Small group participation 1 practice session and two group sessions led by group leader | 1:15-2:30 |
| 10. Summary and sharing | 2:30-3 p.m. |
| 11. Homeward bound | 3 p.m. |

Illustration 5. One Day Seminar Detailed Outline

Taking an Inward Glance Praying the Word via Lectio Divina

One Day Seminar Detailed Outline

1. Welcome and introductions:

- Welcome each participant to your church or facility. Make sure that everyone is settled and comfortable. Give directions to the bathrooms or any other area that they may need to access.
- Take the time to go around the room and have each individual introduce themselves and ask why they have chosen to participate in this seminar.

2. The history of lectio divina.--slides 1-8

3. Why is lectio divina pertinent to our Christian generation?--slides 9-11

4. The relevance of Scripture today.--slides 12-14

5. Break

6. The dynamics of lectio divina--slides 15-18

7. Lunch break

8. Pointers--slide 19

9. Small group participation

- Divide the participants into equal small groups and have each group designate a group leader. The group leader will be responsible for reading the scripture.
- Assign each group two Scripture passages that they will use for their lectio sessions.
- One practice session led by seminar leader and two group sessions led by group leaders

10. Summary and sharing

Homeward bound

Illustration 6. Running Dialogue for Taking an Inward Glance

- History of Lectio Divina slide 1
- According to history some say that Origen laid the groundwork for lectio divina as he read and prayed to find deeper meaning in the text. Born in Alexandria Egypt in 185 A.D., he was considered the greatest scholar of Christian antiquity. Origen was considered a mystic and the father of the spiritual sense of scripture.
- The History of Lectio Divina slide 2
- *Lectio divina* is the Latin word for *divine reading*, spiritual reading, or holy reading. It is a practice of prayer and scriptural reading that promotes communion with God and enhances a person's knowledge of the *Word* of God. It is a way of praying the scripture that draws one to study, reflect, listen and pray God's Word.
- History of Lectio Divina slide 3
- By the 5th century monasticism made *lectio divina* a daily part of their horarium or The Hours. The Hours was part of the monks daily schedule with times of prayer and silence interspersed through the day and evening. The Hours are still practiced today.
- History of Lectio Divina slide 4
- Other scholars believe that the founders of the tradition of *lectio divina* were Pope Gregory I and Saint Benedict. Pope Gregory I (c. 540-604) was also known as Gregory the Great. He was the first of the Popes to come from a Monastic background. Saint Benedict of Nursia (c.480 to 547) founded monastic communities and is known for his "Rule" which were precepts written for his monks to live by. The precepts were Christ centered teaching how to live the Christian life and taught how to run a monastery.
- History of Lectio Divina slide 5
- Benedict extolled the value of divine reading in his Rule and made it a daily part of the ritual and life of the Benedictine Monks. Daily life in a Benedictine monastery was very structured and consisted of three elements: liturgical prayer, physical labor and lectio divina. The scriptures were often read aloud to the monks due to the fact that many were illiterate and Bibles and books were in short supply.

- The History of Lectio Divina slide 6
- Saint Benedict, in his Rule, stipulated specific times and manners for lectio divina, but the progression from reading, to meditation, to prayer, to loving regard toward God, was first formally described by Guigo II. Around 1150 A.D. Guigo wrote "The Monks Ladder". The imagery in his writing resembles Jacob's ladder reaching from earth to heaven in Genesis 28. He named the four steps of this "ladder" of prayer *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. (Latin)
- History of Lectio Divina slide 7
- In Guigo's four stages, one first Reads, which leads to Meditate on the importance of the text; Which leads the person to respond in Prayer. The fourth stage is when the prayer points to the gift of quiet stillness in the presence of God or Contemplation. The understanding of the four movements is progressive where the ultimate results are contemplative union with God.
- History of Lectio Divina slide 8
- In September of 2005 Pope Benedict XVI stated that he wanted to recall and recommend the Ancient Art of lectio divina, believing the practice would bring a spiritual renewal to the church. This renewal has progressively begun to take root and is like a garden that is sprouting upward with roots going deep into the soil of human hearts. As Christians we need to continue to water and cultivate the soil of lectio divina so that it will continue to grow and bring the blessing of the Word of God to the human heart.
- Why Lectio Divina? Slide 9
- Man has drifted away from his roots--The world pulls us in many directions--The Word of God is essential for our spiritual health--Lectio divina brings us into communion with the Word--lectio divina is the gateway to transformation through the Word.
- Why Lectio Divina? Slide 10
- Praying the Scriptures helps us to build a spiritual foundation. It aids the reader with the inward glance which promotes transformation of the heart and helps us to meet and know the God we serve.
- Why Lectio Divina? Slide 11

- It's portable--Can be practiced almost anywhere, home, work, your favorite sacred space.--Can be practiced alone or in groups.--Can be practiced online with others.--Aids us in our internal journey in the Word.--Aids us in achieving union with God.
- The Relevance of Scripture slide 12
- Reading Scripture means that we want to know and hear from God. The Scriptures are God's letters to us.--They teach us about God.--They are living and bring life-Psalm 1.--They are truth-John 17:17.--They teach us about Salvation-Acts 4:12.--Jesus is the Word—John 1
- The Relevance of Scripture slide 13
- Paul reveals to us in the pastoral letter of II Timothy, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”
- “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (3:14-17)
- The Relevance of Scripture slide 14
- The whole council of God is needed if one is to remain balanced. It is dangerous and presumptuous to pick and choose isolated scriptures. The Christian Scriptures are the primary text for Christian Spirituality. The Scriptures are food for the Christian without taking them in the Christian becomes malnourished. In a constantly changing world, God does not change. His Word is a constant in our lives.
- The Four Stages of Lectio Divina slide 15
Slide of the four stages.
- The Dynamics of Lectio Divina slide 16

- St John of the Cross's paraphrase of a verse from St. Luke's Gospel 11:9 gives us an outline of the four steps of Lectio: Seek in Reading, and you will find in meditation, knock in prayer, it will be opened to you in contemplation.
- Four Stages of Lectio Divina slide 17
- **Lectio—Reading**
- a slow reading of the Scriptures listening for a word or phrase that speaks to you or gives you an invitation.
- **Meditatio—Meditation**
- Where does the passage speak to your life?
- **Oratio—Prayer**
- How does the Word relate to your life today?--How is God present to you?--Has God called you to look at something in your life?
- **Contemplatio—Contemplation**
- Resting with God's Word--Rest in the silence of God's embrace.--Give yourself permission to be touched by God.
- Group Lectio slide 18
- Choose a Scripture passage and keep it relatively short.
- Group leader: read the Scripture out loud, then silently wait a minute or two.
- Read the Scripture a second time listening for a word or phrase that stands out to you.
- Read the Scripture a third time listening for what the word or phrase is speaking to you. Share with others if you feel comfortable.
- Pointers slide 19

- Set aside time for you and God.--Develop a sacred space where it is quiet.--Avoid interruptions.--Get comfortable. Use music to decompress if needed.--Bring a notebook and pen for journaling.--Don't come with pre-conceived ideas.--Open your heart and mind to God.

APPENDIX B**PRE AND POST-SURVEY FORMS FOR THE E-100 CHALLENGE**

Bridges of Hope
A Ministry of the
Salvation Army
5 Mechanic Street
Attleboro, MA 02703

A 100-Day Commitment to read God's Word (8/5/09-11/12/09)

This is a Pre-evaluation Survey. The answers are anonymous and are to be used in a thesis. It is optional for you to participate.

Thank you for your participation and assistance.

What is your gender?

☐ Female

☐ Male

What is your age? _____

What is your race?

☐ African-American

☐ Asian

☐ Hispanic

☐ Native American

☐ White

☐ Other

Do you currently participate in Sunday School/Christian Education?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not Available

☐ Don't Know

100 Day Pre-Evaluation Survey continued.

Do you currently participate in a group Bible Study (other than Sunday School)?

- ☐ Weekly
 - ☐ Monthly
 - ☐ Yearly
 - ☐ I do not attend church
-

How many years have you been a follower of Jesus Christ? _____

In the last seven days, how many days did you read/listen to scripture/Bible readings? _____

Within the past seven days, approximately how many minutes did each Bible reading/listening session last? _____

Have you ever attempted to read through the entire Bible?

- ☐ No, I have never attempted.
- ☐ I attempted to, but did not finish.
- ☐ Yes, and I finished it once.
- ☐ Yes, and I finished it more than once.

Once again, thank you for your cooperation and assistance in completing this survey and I look forward to the completion of the survey at the end of your 100 day commitment.

Bridges of Hope
A Ministry of the
Salvation Army
5 Mechanic Street
Attleboro, MA 02703

The conclusion of the 100-Day Commitment to read God's Word

This is a Post-evaluation Survey. The answers are anonymous and are to be used in a thesis. It is optional for you to participate.
Thank you for your participation and assistance.

What is your gender?

☐ Female

☐ Male

What is your age? _____

Do you currently participate in Sunday School/Christian Education?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not Available

Do you currently participate in a group Bible Study (other than Sunday school)?

☐ Weekly

☐ Monthly

☐ Yearly

☐ I do not attend church

How often do you attend a worship service on Saturday/Sunday? _____

Within the past seven days, approximately how many minutes did each Bible reading/listening session last? _____

How many of the Essential 100 reading did you complete? _____

A 100-Day Post –Evaluation Survey continued.

There has been a substantial increase in my biblical awareness as a result of the E-100 challenge.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

The E-100 Challenge has greatly aided me in the development of the daily application of the Bible in my personal life?

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

There has been a major increase in my desire to read the Bible because of the E-100 Challenge?

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

There has been a major increase in my closeness to Christ because of the E-100 Challenge?

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Once again thank you for your cooperation and assistance in completing this survey.

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VITA

The author of this work is Ruth W. Blais, born April 10, 1945 in Norwood, Massachusetts and raised in Wrentham, Massachusetts where she attended elementary and high school. Working as a nurse for thirty years she experienced a spiritual conversion at age thirty five and began pursuing active ministry opportunities which led to her entering Andover Newton Theological Seminary where she graduated with a Masters of Divinity degree in 2001. This project is presented in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the Doctor of Ministry degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Her studies began in January of 2007 will be completed in May 2012.

Mrs. Blais currently lives in Attleboro, Massachusetts with her husband Warren. She has recently retired from church planting with The Salvation Army Massachusetts Division and looks forward to her next mission for Jesus.

